

John Conger

- Born 2/27/1921 in New Brunswick, New Jersey; Deceased 6/24/2006
- Spouse – Trista Kline
- B.A. (1943) Amherst College, M.S. (1947) Yale University, Ph.D. (1949) Yale University

Major Employment:

- University of Colorado Health Sciences Center – 1984-1985, Professor of Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry and Interim Chairman
- University of Colorado School of Medicine – 1988, Professor Emeritus

SRCD Affiliation:

- Program Committee (1972), Chairman (1974-75)



SRCD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

John Conger

Interviewed by Robert Emde
In Denver, Colorado
November 17, 1993

Emde: This is November 17, 1993 and I am sitting with Dr. John Conger in his office suite on the seventh floor of South Cherry Drive in Denver Colorado, overlooking Mount Evans and a panorama actually that goes from Pikes Peak to Longs Peak and I suppose that's some 200 miles. How many miles are we looking out there at?

Conger: I don't know but it's a lot.

Emde: It's a lot. It's a beautiful day with the snow in the background. When I commented on being the inspiration of this John earlier, the phrase you used that came to your mind, the biblical phrase?

Conger: Whence cometh my strength, my strength cometh from the hills.

Emde: It reminds me hearing that, that I know in this office you are continuing your writings, including poetry and various activities that we may hear more about later. This is of course, an oral history interview for SRCD. I am Bob Emde, conducting the interview. John and I have gone over the outline purposed by the history committee and we've decided that we are going to proceed more or less according to the framework of the outline and the topics provided. I thought it'd be useful for me to also, and these sessions of course will be recorded and transcribed and become part of the archives of the society and used. We are essentially interested in your perspectives on the field, your career and in particular in relation to perspectives that would be useful to our organization and your involvement with it. We'll come to that later I think in the interview. It's important for me to perhaps, in framing this interview a bit further, to comment that John has an illustrious career that has been multi-disciplinary throughout, it seems to me, in terms of your interests and activities. Your training in clinical psychology and deep commitment to clinical approaches to psychology, has been evidenced in these broad ranging activities that have included being Dean of the Medical School at the University of Colorado, Vice President of the University of Colorado. You have been a leader in psychology, President of the American Psychological Association, very active in SRCD, you've been a leader on the national front, both in private foundations and in government work and have really given your creative perspectives and initiatives not only in writing but in public life and in public policy and we'll

hear about that later. Now you're actually retired officially from the university but still very active in the affairs of the university, and how long have you been retired John?

Conger: 1988. So this will be my fifth year.

Emde: Your fifth year.

Conger: But I stayed on part time for 3 years. In 1988 when I decided to retire, I was sort of looking for office space like this, and in the midst of it I got a letter jointly signed by the Chancellor and the Dean and the Chairman of the Department and director of CPH (Colorado Psychiatric Hospital), saying that they had a proposal to make which they thought would be to their advantage and to my advantage. That was that if I would be available to consult about whatever problems they wanted to consult about, 10% of my time, that in return the department would let me keep an office and the Dean would pay me a 10% salary and the Chancellor would pay to have my secretary of some 30 years, Dorothy Townsend, come in a couple of days a week. So I went home and told Trista that this was triple Martini time. So for three years I did keep my office at the Medical School, but two years ago I decided that, everybody was new; new Chancellor, new Dean, and it was time for me to get out of everybody's hair over there. So I got this office over here, which I am very happy with and just signed a lease for two more years.

Emde: Terrific. I should have added one other thing in terms of the framing for, ultimately, the reader of this oral history. Another framing perspective on your career, that I wanted to say right at the outset, is that you've been an author of two leading textbooks in multiple editions, in adolescent development and in child development in general, and I'm sure we'll get to those later in the interview in terms of your perspectives about being an editor and an author. So at this point, John, as we agreed, we might talk about your background in terms of your experiences in growing up, your educational experiences and your family. So there you might tell us where you were born, where you grew up and your schooling and early career experience. I'll let you go on from there.

Conger: OK. Well I was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, February 27th, 1921 and I grew up there and in Vermont for summer time. So I guess spiritually Vermont is as much my home as New Jersey, but probably more so at this point in my life. I think I probably was a by-product of parents, both of whom were very devoted to myself and my sister, but who came from, I think, quite different backgrounds. My mother was kind of the old aristocracy financially on the way down, you know it was Colonel Janeway's that was the house in the park where George Washington, he was one of George Washington's Chief s of Staff. So in contrast my father's father had run away from home at age 14, his father was looking for success in the gold rush in California and I don't think he got along too well with my grandfather, who ran away and joined the Civil War at age 14 by telling them he was 16. He was a drummer boy or bugler or something and he epitomized middle class and middle class values. He started out as a canal boy with barges in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and eventually ended up as the President of the local bank, President of both the Protestant and Catholic hospitals and kind of the senior citizen for our town. I think that these contrasting forces from both sides of my parents have played a really major role in a way, in which I developed. I'm certain that my interest in poetry and literature and my determination early on to become a poet and to earn my living by being an English professor, came from my mother, who was I think a pretty good poet. A failed detective story writer, but I think a pretty good poet. My interest in art and music I think came largely from her. From my father I think learned about how to be everyman. He was a gregarious soul who got along extremely well with all kinds of people. I thought he should have been a politician, but he never saw it that way. But he was the kind of person who got along, when he was working in the telephone business he got along equally well with the people cutting trees in the forest in South Carolina, to the President of New England Bell Telephone.

Emde: So he was a businessman?

Conger: Yes. He wanted to be a farmer. He had gone to Rutgers College, as it was called in those days, which my mother's family had had a role in founding, when it was Queens College. But he found out when he graduated that to be a farmer, which is what he wanted to be, took some money to be able to buy a farm, and he didn't have any money. So what happened is he went right into World War I in the Navy, where again, I ultimately followed him. When he was discharged from the Navy it turned out he had TB and a young son on the way, and when that got resolved he just had to take the first job he could get which was as a runner on Wall Street, delivering securities and eventually ended up as branch manager of a brokerage firm in New Jersey, Eastman Dillon. But he never did like it,

never bought and sold stocks for himself, but was very good at preserving the security of elderly widows and so forth, who survived the crash of 1930's much better than the clients of many people. From him I think I learned something about just relating to a very broad spectrum of people and I think I learned middle class values of, the world doesn't owe you a living you have to go out and doing something worthwhile to prove that you're worth your keep. So I think kind of middle class values of responsibility and doing the things that you should do to justify your existence in your community and in your life, were things where he played a major role. I think that much of his I didn't think of it at the time, but as I look back, I think this contrasting set of influences from my mother's family on the one side, and my father's on the other played a big role in my life and the way in which it developed.

Emde: But also I'm hearing not only a sense of pride as you look back on it in what you learned from your mother and your father, but also perhaps even a more pervasive sense of a cultural tradition that you absorbed from your family. I wonder, am I hearing that right? You included some real urges to commitment to some kind of communal responsibility.

Conger: I think that's right. I think that undoubtedly, it played a role in the way in which I ultimately worked out my life. I think I would have had a hard time just being a poet, or just being an English teacher. On the other hand I think I would have had equal problem of let's say being just a businessman. I think that I wanted to do something where I could express the cultural interest that I had in literature and art and in music, and at the same time, while I never thought of it because I never volunteered for any administrative job in my life, but I kept ending up with them from graduate school to practically the present. I think that while I never volunteered for it, I got a feeling of satisfaction out of assuming responsibility and trying to improve the community that I lived in, whether it was community of the city or the medical community of the School, or what-not. So I think that both of those factors played a role, and I think also that-- and I'm sure you get this from a lot of the people that you all are interviewing if you're interviewing my age group-- I think the Depression played a significant role in all of our lives. Again, this sense of obligation and also this sense that the world doesn't necessarily owe you a living. It doesn't come pre-guaranteed. Which would contrast with my mother's tradition that, you are who you are, and that just naturally works out. But from my father's side, it doesn't naturally work out, and also we got clobbered by the Depression. I remember one day we had a house, we had a maid, we had a man that came in to stoke the furnace because we had coal in those days, and we had two cars, and the next day we had no cars and we had....

Emde: How old were you then?

Conger: Let's see, I was about 10 years old, something like that. I was old enough to be aware, sort of, but also very well protected by my family, in terms of not letting my sister and myself know that there really was some potential jeopardy. They said a lot of things are going to be more difficult, and we'll have to economize, but everything is going to be perfectly all right, and we assumed that that would be so. I'm certain my parents had many sleepless nights because they weren't all that sure it would be so. I think one of the things was impressed upon me, at least unconsciously, was the fact that the world doesn't necessarily, it may owe you a living, but doesn't necessarily give you a living, and you have to do something to justify your existence. And my mother told me one time that I had said, "What could I ever do that would be worthwhile enough for people to pay me?" I don't think that the kids growing up in the 60's would ever had any awareness of these ideas; they thought, well I may not be able to be a millionaire if I do whatever the heck I want to do, but of course I don't have to worry about a living, that just goes with it, that's the 60's kids. So anyway, when I got in high school, and I think I had a few friends as a child, but there were very few friends that I really, I think we were kind of socio-economically isolated in my town, so there were about 5 boys that I interacted with during my early childhood years. I went away to school in North Carolina at age 14 and really had no great desire to go back ever to New Jersey. But while I was in school in North Carolina, two people had an enormous influence on me. One was Elliott Coleman who taught 5th form English and who subsequently went to Hopkins, and while he was only a minor poet himself, is very well known. I read in the New York Times when he retired, of the numbers of novelists, poets and so forth that grew up under his tutelage at John Hopkins, who felt that they owed a great deal to him. He took an interest in me very early on and in my poetry during the years when I was writing like Alfred Lord Tennyson, and then pretty soon I started writing like T. S. Eliot, and then eventually-- I hope-- I got my own voice. Another major influence who I've been having reunions with lately, who is now 88 years old and sharp as a tack, is a fellow named Charles Rice, who was the head of the English department and theater and was my dorm master, and his lovely wife Tib, that all the boys were madly in love with. He encouraged me in theater and in writing generally, and in poetry specifically. So at the time that I left to go to Amherst College which I went to, at least 50% of the reason I went there, was because of the tradition in

poetry. The Poet in Residence at that time was David Morton, and Robert Frost came occasionally to teach and that's where Emily Dickinson grew up. In fact, I passed her house every day for four years or actually 3 1/2 years on the way to school. I was determined to become a poet and I gathered I would have to probably become an English professor in order to eat as a poet, and that's what I had planned to do. I think what happened, well two things, what happened when I went there (Amhurst) was that I started off and did the first two years taking the English honors programs, if you were going to go to graduate school you had to take the honors program and while looking through the catalog for courses to take, I wanted to take a course in philosophy, but then I found out that this course in philosophy that I wanted to take came at the same hour as a course in medieval literature which was required for honors students. So I couldn't take that course and I looked further. There was a new course in the catalog called psychology, which was pretty new at Amherst, whereas English was an ancient and honorable tradition, psychology was new and had probably zero respect academically. But there was a young guy named Glen Heathers who had just graduated from Yale, and was an Assistant Professor. So I said, well psychology/philosophy it's all the same thing, I'll sign up for this course with Glen Heathers, which I did. In the course of that I think he sort of seduced me into having a strong interest in psychology. At the end of that year he said, "Have you got a summer job?" And I said, no but I have to get one. I'd taught as a camp counselor the summer before, because I was working my way through school. And he said, well Norwich State Hospital in Connecticut, all the attendants are quitting to go to work for the defense industries that were sprouting up prior to the war, and it was leaving patients sort of abandoned, so they are recruiting 40 boys and girls, pre-med majors and psychology majors to work for the summer, and I'll put in a word for you if you have an interest in doing that. And I said, "Well that sounds fine." So I spent a summer in this State Mental Hospital which was quite an amazing experience, because I'd been there I think two weeks, with my total background in anything to do with psychiatry, psychology, medicine, mental health, being having taken Psychology 101 at that point. Suddenly within two weeks of being there, I was in sole charge at night of the "semi disturbed" male ward, as they phrased things in that time.

Emde: Where was that state hospital?

Conger: In Norwich Connecticut.

Emde: Was it in one of those old civil war designs where you had the entrance and then it would zigzag back on it left and right for men and women and then as you get further back you get to the locked wards and the more hopeless cases?

Conger: Absolutely. The cases kept crowding further and further forward, but that was very much the case. I remember the first time I walked into where I was only briefly for a couple of weeks, I was on the "most disturbed ward" for two weeks before I got transferred to night duty on the "semi disturbed" ward where I was the only attendant at night. You always hold onto the door when you unlock your door, and hold onto it until you lock the door on the other side. I carefully unlocked it (the "most disturbed ward" door) and I held onto the door and I turned around and locked it again, and turned back into the room and the first thing that happened was that somebody hit me in the jaw and knocked me about 20 feet across the room, and the other attendants said, "Welcome to the ward, whatever number it was, and now you've had your initiation, because he always hits every new attendant, but he only hits you once, so you won't get hit again." I don't think I was very reassured. But at any rate during that summer it was great, because we'd get off at 2:00 in the morning, or something like that and there were an equal number of boys and girls and we really had a very good time. And I became increasingly interested in what is making these people tick that I'm taking care of here. So I began to think when I went back to Amhurst that this is what I would like to get to know more about. So that was one of the two things I think that helped to switch me to psychology. The other I think is sort of amusing because when I went back and announced that I was going to change my major, the chairman of the English department, George Wicher, called me in and said, "I really feel very apologetic because I didn't think that we needed to reassure you that you were perfectly qualified to go onto graduate school in English and become an English professor, but I see you've put in to change your major and it really isn't necessary, because we think you can do perfectly well in English and I'm sorry I didn't make that clear if I hadn't." And I said, well that wasn't really the reason, I said that I'd gotten interested in psychology and told him about the experiences that. I'd had and I said, "Part of my interest in poetry, the major part, is in the craft of poetry, but in addition to the craft of poetry, I also view poetry as kind of a way of exploring the human condition, and I suppose exploring who I myself really am." And I said, "In poetry you sort of go down a dark corridor here and you get another clue, and you go down another dark corridor and you get a clue, but these psychologists have got it all figured out and they have vectors and valances and values and all that." I'd read Schaffer's Psychology of Adjustment in that year and I'd also

had a political science professor who got me reading Freud's Civilization and its Discontents, and Walter Lippman's book on propaganda and public opinion. So I said, they've got this stuff all figured out, to which George Witcher said that he thought that was pretty ridiculous. And David Morton the Poet in Residence said he knew it was ridiculous. He said if you really want to learn about the human condition you read Dostoevsky and Shakespeare, you certainly don't go around with vectors and valances. About 10 years later I decided that they were undoubtedly right. So I think a second reason that I switched to psychology and later to an interest in child development and in adolescents in particular was to understand people better, including myself. I didn't start off that way even in psychology; I never had a course in child psychology or development in graduate school, I think I was influenced by my own childhood and adolescent. I think possibly partly because my mother and father came from such different worlds, I was a little more occupied with who I am, than maybe the average kid was. I also didn't have a lot of immediate friends when I was a child. When I went away to prep school, I really felt very much alone. I think I was the

Emde: Where did you go to prep-school?

Conger: I went to Asheville School in North Carolina. I'd applied to Hotchkiss and the day that I went to take the Latin part of the exams for entrance, it turns out I had scarlet fever and a temperature of 104, and anyway I did not get the full scholarship I needed and I'm sure even if I hadn't had scarlet fever, I probably wouldn't have. I asked the Hotchkiss headmaster, if I can't go to Hotchkiss, what do you think is the other best school most like Hotchkiss, and he said, well I think the Asheville School in North Carolina. I applied there and I was accepted and it was a very fortuitous thing for me. But I think that I felt quite insecure as an adolescent, not quite sure how to relate to other kids, and if I really belonged. So as not encounter the possibility of any rebuff or rejection, I think what I developed was a-- Noel Coward was kind of my hero at the time-- and I developed a kind of an acerbic wit which served as a kind of armor, you know, I could hit first, or at least I could answer back very quickly if anybody seemed to

Emde: It was very New England as well.

Conger: Yes. Yes. That's true. So running into people that I went to prep school with, years later, it was kind of ironic when they said, you know you were really very popular, but people were sort of scared of you because they thought you might zap them with some Noel Coward like statement. Well, of course, it was all purely self-protective. I went through all the usual business about sex and the only education we had on sex with the school doctor, was "Keep your pecker in your pants," he said and if you didn't, you'd probably get some horrible disease. So when, despite a sexually non-existent existence, I got some mild prostatitis one time, I remember and I was sure that I had gonorrhea and 27 other diseases.

Emde: Because of your bad thoughts?

Conger: Yes, my bad thoughts. Which of course I did not. I was very shy with girls until I discovered there was nothing to be shy about. So I think that I could feel how adolescents could struggle with the problem of growing up.

Emde: I was just going to reflect on something John, and give you a chance to catch your breath in this wonderful narrative stream. Just a reflection, I know you had thought as deeply about adolescents as anyone and contributed to it in your perspectives and as I hear your narrative I'm struck with a couple of angles that I wanted to ask you about that are striking to me. One is that you indicate that you had to work your way through Amherst and this was influential, having to work. And yet you described yourself as coming from really quite an advantaged family, who even in the depression protected you, although you knew the tensions that must have been you were protected from, you certainly didn't experience hardship and poverty. Your mother's family was advantaged and your father was at least not a failure in business. So I wanted to ask you about that, that's one little piece. Another piece, it's also true that the Rockefellers were raised with an ethic to work their way through every little piece of beginnings of their education and career and allowances and so on and whether that was part of the culture of your family. But another part and it really imprecates with your adolescent experience, another part that I'm struck with is you describe again and again your moving from your literary, poetic inclinations and plans, not inclinations but plans for a career at least, into psychology. To maybe caricature it a bit, as a passive experience, so I wanted to throw that out to you. What I don't hear, that is you sort of become under the influence of one teacher or you happen to go to the Mental Hospital, and then suddenly you're seduced into psychology, yet knowing you, I don't see you nor did I know

anyone in the medical school when you were Dean, who talked about you being easily seduced. So that's another paradox.

Conger: Try inspired by.

Emde: In the midst of this, thinking of it as your adolescent experience and really a turning point in your career track, your plans, what I don't hear is the rebelliousness and did you have any rebelliousness as an adolescent?

Conger: I think it was a fairly mild kind of rebellion. I think my father was sort of puzzled by my cultural interests, and why wasn't I more concerned about earning a living. I don't think I really was very I was an intellectual rebel, but I wasn't a very acting-out rebel. Let me address the first part and then come back to that. I really did need to have a job in school and college, it wasn't the Rockefeller - cold showers because it's good for you kind of routine. Although I went to that kind of a prep school, where we wore white shirts and collars and ties at dinner and we did take cold showers, and it wasn't quite Groton, but it was very much kind of on that order, and I believe it's loosened up a great deal since. But I did have to have a scholarship because my mother's family had been ~ family in the town, but my great grandfather had a wallpaper factory and was adored by all the employees, but he lost it. So as I say in my book of poetry in the Song for my Mother, her mother really lost all of her worldly goods when the wallpaper failed, and so forth. So she (my grandmother) despite having grown up in mansions with Commodore Vanderbilt's father as a coachman ended up living above a druggist in a small apartment. But she never had any doubt who she was and it didn't matter where she lived. She's given me a carved ivory calling card case that J. P. Morgan had given her when he was sort of mildly courting her, I guess, and the portrait of my great-grandfather by Sully was hanging on the wall. So it didn't matter where she ... she knew exactly who she was and she conveyed that sense to my mother. But we were really on hard times. We never had to worry about eating. My father salvaged the office and salvaged his clients and they contributed what they could to me in prep school. But I really did have to have a scholarship if I was going to go away to school. So that wasn't the stiff upper lip stuff, it was really a financial necessity. I think what they protected me from was how bad it could really have been, or how worried they really were.

Emde: So it never really affected your identify, I hear a very strong sense of identity in your family that continued, including an identity that projected you into the future.

Conger: That's true and I know when I went to prep school most of the kids, not all of them, were from well to do families and they didn't monitor the telephone switchboard like I did to help pay for my but I never had the feeling that, gosh I'm sort of around the edges. It sounds obnoxious but you didn't think about it in those days, if you knew who you were, you knew who your family was, so it didn't really matter whether you had five cents or no cents or a billion, it was all irrelevant. So I never had, "Oh gosh I could never relate to them, they're in some kind of a different socioeconomic order." So I had that kind of real security, and the fact that my classmates might be drinking scotch and I was maybe occasionally able to drink beer, might have been annoying, but it had nothing to do with being as good as anybody else. I never had any doubt that I was as good, I had doubts about how successfully I was going to relate to other boys and girls, but that had nothing to do with this identity as a person in a family and that kind of thing. With respect to going into psychology, I guess seduced probably isn't too good a word, although I'm sure Glen Heathers really had a plot. One of the things he did was, he was about the only teacher I ever had that I couldn't con at all whenever I would, in my writing or whatnot, would try to con him or: take shortcuts. He would always nail me on it which practically nobody else ever did. One of the things that played an influence in my going into, especially, child and adolescent development was, it's not only knowing the struggles and ups and downs that adolescents have, and still being able to recall and identify with them, I also think, especially if you're going to be a clinician, unless you are going to start taking it out on the kids that you're trying to work with, I think you not only have to have had some of the experience that led you to identify with adolescents, but you also have to have kind of resolved them, because if you're trying to work out your own adolescent identity problems, and I know you've seen this with residents and psychology trainees, if you're still trying to work out your own adolescence by working with adolescents, it's not good for either of you. But I think what happened when I got to Amherst was, it was really kind of amusing. The fraternity system -- now thankfully abolished-- was very strong then. I got recruited by the Delta Kappa Epsilon Fraternity, who were otherwise irreverently known as the Drunken Dekes, which consisted of most of the football team. I think the chairman of the student newspaper, too, but basically a group of very laid back athletes. But they decided that they ought to have a couple of eggheads, maybe for tutoring purposes I don't know,

but maybe just people who could sort of talk and tell jokes. I was at the height of my Noel Coward "wit" at that point so a guy named Norm Calquhoun and I, was subsequently a clerk to Justice Burton of the U.S. Supreme Court, a brilliant guy-- the two of us were recruited, I think, as kind of novelty features, because we were the two eggheads who knew how to talk. So I was very accepted by this laid-back group of athletes and that's where I learned, I think, to just relax and be me, and not have to be defensively witty or Noel Cowardish. So I eventually ended up feeling very comfortable about having been an adolescent and being a young person and madly falling in love. Serial monogamy I guess they call it these days. So I think that kind of experience in growing up played a role in my interest in child development and how people get to be the way they are, and played a role in my special interest in adolescence. I remember in trying to supervise, like, second year residents on the adolescent service, or psychology interns, you could tell quickly-- I think like in the first two weeks-- whether adolescents were their cup of tea or not, even though they might be pretty good at treating younger children or they might be pretty good at relating to adults, following all the socially prescribed client/therapist, patient/therapist, doctor/patient relationships. But you could tell in about two weeks if adolescents were or weren't their cup of tea, this resident's or whatnot cup of tea. I think a couple of the things that made a difference in whether they could or not was whether they had in some way resolved their own adolescence. I think another one was whether they felt comfortable in the role-- I suppose that's related, but comfortable in the role of a kind of concerned adult, but not a pompous adult. I think that you need to, just like being a successful parent, I think you need not to be, you know, to be one of the boys, which is fatal, or to be the authoritarian "I am the doctor and here is the course to follow", which might work with some adults, does not work with adolescents. So I think you have to have some flexibility, humility, openness, and at the same time not abandon your role as a concerned adult, because adolescents as you know as well as anybody, even a very troubled adolescent would take about two seconds to spot what your Achilles heel is and latch onto it. This is a digression, but you also can't expect great gratitude for being such an all giving soul. But I remember this one kid protesting violently that the resident who was his therapist, that "He doesn't understand me and he doesn't understand anything and he's not having any influence on me." And all the while this resident who had a lot of verbal and physical mannerisms in the way he walked, and each day this kid was walking more like him and talking more like him, but stoutly denying that he was having any influence on him. So these are, I think, kinds of things that led me into psychology and child development.

Emde: Maybe it would be terrific if we had time to probe many of these different personal leads into the dynamics of your adolescence as it related to your career choice. Maybe we could come back to some of that later, but I think probably we want to move on now to your experience. You became a psychology major at Amherst right?

Conger: We had to accelerate because of the war.

Emde: Your graduate school and your military experience.

Conger: Right, I got out of college in the beginning of 1943 instead of June because we accelerated due to the war. I still retained an interest in poetry and I was the Class' Poet. The year before it had been Richard Wilbur; he is now the poet laureate of the country. But he and I were the two that were serious about poetry, except he became a very fine poet. So I was the Class Poet and from one day delivering this "meaning of the whole world" poem to the assembled students and their parents at graduation, I found myself the next day suddenly in Midshipman's School, following, I guess, in my father's footsteps, who had been on the Old Missouri in World War I. I was suddenly not the class poet I was 0492461 and having skivvies shorts and uniforms thrown at me. So I spent the next three and a half years in the Navy and eventually becoming skipper of a destroyer escort and subsequently, division commodore, due to a number of foul-ups in the Navy Personnel Department. I think they thought they were appointing somebody more senior than me. But I did get out in February of 1946. I was one time in Havana with our Ship, we were the only Americans there, obviously, in war time. I was in some store where they were insisting I have a Cuba Libre (drink) before buying any goods, and I was looking at an old copy of LIFE, which said that Yale was accepting, as a patriotic gesture, they were accepting people for at such time as the war would be over, conditional upon their performance on the Graduate Record Exam. So I applied from Havana to Yale, and I was accepted conditionally, and I ended up on terminal leave there (at Yale) in February of 1946. Suddenly being exposed to all the bright young graduate students who were just fresh out of Oberlin or Vassar or City College or whatnot, and all extremely verbal, extremely bright was quite a shock. There was one other new guy, Homer Wood, and I, we immediately spotted each other because he had on an Army raincoat and I had on a Navy raincoat. You couldn't get clothes very easily in those days, even if you had any money to buy them. We spotted each other and

right after the first proseminar I remember he said, "Are you here on terminal leave?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well so am I." He said, "Did you understand anything the teacher said." Homer and I went over to the local greasy spoon and over a cup of coffee, he said, "Did you understand anything the teacher said?" I said, "Very little." He said, "What about the students?" I said, "Even less." And he said, "What do you plan to do about it?" And I said, "Well I really don't know, what do you plan to do about it." And he said "I'm going to give it six weeks, and if I still don't understand what they're talking about, I'm going down to Madison Avenue and get a job in an advertising agency." And I said, "Well that's a good idea, if I still don't understand what they're talking about, well I'm going to Brattleboro, Vermont and get a job with the Holden Martin Lumber Company and write poetry for the rest of my life. Fortunately, at the end of the six weeks we both more or less understood what was going on, although I spent a very busy semester: I had to make up the first semester, while taking the second semester with these kids who had already been there half the year. So that was a very hectic year. But I gave a talk at Yale a couple months ago, and we had a reunion of all the old faculty and all the old graduate students and a couple of us spoke for each decade. I spoke for the '40s and I told this anecdote about Homer and myself, and I also said among other things, that really those three and a half years that I spent at Yale were probably the most intellectually exciting of my entire life. It was partly because of the excellence of the faculty at Yale, the small number of graduate students, the incredibly distinguished faculty, but it was also a product of the times, because everything seemed possible. - In health, I think too, it looked like there had been incredible breakthroughs in biology. But we really had the feeling that psychology was on the edge of the kind of development that physics took early in the century or that later microbiology took. Before I gave that talk, I just went through and grabbed books off the shelf here in this office to get something about the climate, what we were exposed to in those days. It was really pretty incredible, I mean it ranged from Parson's General Theory of Action and Warner and Lunt's Social Life of a Modern Community, to Gordon Allport's Personality, Kurt Lewin's Field Theory, Murray's Explorations in Personality, and Skinner's Behavior of Organisms, as well as Joe Hunt's Personality and the Behavior Disorders. There was a marriage of cultural anthropology, sociology, history, and psychoanalysis in Erik Fromm's Escape from Freedom and John Dollard's Caste and Class in a Southern Town, which is still a classic. At that time, Freud was still sort of a novelty to all but a small group. Miller and Dollard's Social Learning and Imitation, and Personality and Psychotherapy attempted to apply learning theory to social learning and psychoanalytic concepts. We students in psychology were exposed to a lot of cultural anthropology and other behavioral and biological sciences. One of the great things, in addition to the faculty in psychology, was that we were part then of the Institute of Human Relations, which had been created by the Rockefeller Foundation, with the idea that if you bring the relevant life sciences together, they will have a synergistic effect on each other and will produce breakthroughs.

Emde: Animal behavior too. Wasn't Frank Beach there?

Conger: Absolutely. Right.

Emde: The human relations area fellows were set up then weren't they?

Conger: With John Whiting and Irvin Child which resulted in their Child Training and Personality, and then Frank Beach. So we were not only exposed to the faculty in psychology, which included people like John Dollard and Neal Miller, who came back on terminal leave from the Army the same week I came from the Navy and took over Clark Hull's class in learning theory because he was sort of on his death bed at that point, writing the last chapter of Principles of Behavior. Frank Beach, who was just fresh from the Museum of Natural History, became a Sterling Professor in Psychology. And Irvin Child, who I think was one of the most influential people for me and, strangely enough, one of the most influential people on my going into child development, because he taught a course called Personality, which really was an approach to personality development, and I think that had a big influence on both Paul Mussen and myself. But one of the great things about the Institute in terms of the conception, was that if you throw cultural anthropology, psychology, neurophysiology, some sociology, throw them all together, psychiatry, pediatrics, if you throw them all together you're going to get a product that is greater than the sum of the parts. Well it didn't work very well with many of the professors because they picked the most distinguished people who had their research careers planned past their death. They weren't really very influenced by other people. But it was heaven for the graduate students because our agendas were still open. I think I learned as much about cultural anthropology as I did about psychology, and I took courses in the medical school in functional neuroanatomy. So it was very exciting, that kind of time and place.

Emde: Just to put a mark or two as we'll pick up on this interview in the next segment, as you said, there was something about that moment in time in the intellectual history in our field there were some centers of enormous trans-disciplinary excitement and commitment and vision. I was just reading the biography by Robinson of Henry or Harry as he was called, Murray. At Harvard at the same time in the center

Conger: New department of Social Relations.

Emde: It became that yes, but it again combined sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, including aspects of medicine, into a enormously energized intellectual exchange that was really quite a moment of history. It took some rebelliousness particularly in the part of some people, because it wasn't looked at with ease by the University establishment, but it spawned an enormous energy for awhile. I think it also did within SRCD, which is something we're trying to recapture again, after two decades of particularization and specialization, and even at Yale soon there became a center for compartmentalized activities, radical behaviorism, almost radical not quite radical, and so on.

Conger: I'm glad you brought that up because I think that's very important. One, I think having had this multi-disciplinary kind of exposure I became, and remain to this day, very resentful of anybody who tries to compartmentalize me or to compartmentalize behavioral science. So being labeled just a psychologist, or just a psychiatrist, or a cultural anthropologist, to me makes no sense, because the concern of all of these is the same. I think instead of being very sophisticated, I think it's very provincial. I guess to this day I resent disciplinary boundaries, is what I'm trying to say. The other thing is that I think it was more feasible to be a generalist in those days, I mean the explosion was exploding, but it was like the early days in the explosion of the universe. There wasn't the opportunity for looking within a cubby hole, within a cubby hole, within a cubby hole. I think all of us, and my classmates resonated to this when I talked back at Yale, we really thought of ourselves as being interested in behavior first. We thought of ourselves as psychologists second, and a very distant third was thinking of ourselves as some kind of a particular psychologist, or social or physical scientists, we thought of ourselves as psychologists first, and then as having one or another interest. The other thing is that with this kind of ferment that you were talking about, we really thought that intellectually all kinds of research was relevant, and there were very good reasons for this. It may be naive in retrospect, but when you saw the stuff that was being produced, it led us to think we were really entering a new age of intellectual discovery, and that we were going to learn an incredible amount in a very short period of time. The other thing which may be somewhat naive in retrospect, was that we felt if only we did make these intellectual breakthroughs and we knew enough and we discovered enough about the individual, and discovered enough about the way individuals relate to society and the way societies relate to each other, that with this knowledge we could then make a better world. So there was this kind of optimism coming out of World War II, where presumably we had done something to save democracy for the second time. So it was not only the excitement of the intellectual breakthroughs we thought were happening and were going to accelerate, but also if we only knew enough we were then going to be able to really change, putting it naively, change the world.

Emde: Maybe we can leave off the narrative stream here. Chapter I of this oral history with post adolescent poet, psychologist, budding activist, who was interested in changing the world.

Well this is shall we call it chapter two of our interest in your historical interview here. We left off when you were finishing graduate school. One thing I'm curious about John is your dissertation.

Conger: Right. Well, let me say two words about graduate school, then I'll tell you about the dissertation. A couple of things I thought of after you left about those years aside from this kind of ferment that we talked about and the interdisciplinary things that we were exposed to. As, for example, I think we mentioned Whiting and Child's Child Training and Personality, which really brought learning theory and psychoanalysis and cultural anthropological data all together and Dollard et al's Frustration and Aggression, which was really a very multi-disciplinary whole Institute effort. All of which were really very exciting kinds of things. Two other things that I would say about our years at Yale and about this very exciting period when so much was going on there and elsewhere-- we were exposed to Harry Murray and Kurt Lewin. Two things, one was-- and it made a lasting impression on me-- and that was the way that we as students were treated by the faculty, because we were treated very much as colleagues, albeit junior colleagues, rather than simply as students. I really appreciated that and I've tried in my own career to reflect that and to try to have that kind of collegial relation with students. I think it helped us in a lot of ways, one was that when we got out we didn't feel, "Oh my God I'm no longer a graduate student, I'm an assistant professor, teaching

students not much younger than me". We didn't really have this feeling, "Oh I'm in some different world," because of that collegial experience we had. I think really was extremely helpful. Another thing that helped, I think, was we had a large number of faculty in relation to the number of graduate students, a privilege you don't have too much these days. We really were a very tightly knit group. We had very diverse interests-- coming back to this being a psychologist first and a specialist afterward. We had very diverse interests, but we were all interested in what each other was doing and we liked each other, we did things together, we supported each other, and we celebrated our ups and we consoled each other in our downs. While we certainly felt the stress of meeting our own standards and meeting the standards that were expected of us for performance, it was not pitting us against each other. I mean, it was not a zero sum game, it was one where any number could win or any number could lose. We talked about that when I was back for our Reunion and I found that all of my fellow students who were back all felt this same way, that we really played a terrific role in each other's lives. So then coming back to your question about how I picked a dissertation, I was majoring somewhere between "abnormal psychology" and clinical psychology, which was just being created after World War II, and we sort of put our own curriculum together with the Chairman's assistance. So I majored somewhere between clinical and abnormal psychology. My major professor was John Dollard, by my choice, and Neal Miller was my thesis supervisor. I would say they were probably my two biggest influences, and probably Irvin Child was the third biggest influence in view of the approach he brought to personality development. We had, neither Paul nor I, my future co- author and fellow graduate student, ever had a course in anything like child psychology or child development.

Emde: You and Paul Mussen were direct contemporaries?

Conger: Right.

Emde: Same level of graduate school?

Conger: Yes. We got there by different routes because he'd gotten a masters degree at Stanford before joining the Navy, while I was in the Navy longer than he, but he'd gotten out a semester before me, but we were in the same class and we were jointly considered for various jobs at graduation. Harvard said they would like to sort of look us both over, and we got tired of being looked at, so we went and got other jobs. But neither of us had ever had a course in child development. When I came to doing my thesis (and I was majoring in this kind of clinical abnormal and minoring in social with Leonard Doob), I remember one day Frank Beach said, "Well what are you going to do for your dissertation?" And I said, "Well I'm going to do it on the cause of schizophrenia." He said, "Well now that you've told me how you intend to spend your life," he said, "What are you going to do to get your union card?" So I decided I have to get something a little narrower and a little more focused, and time was of the essence. I had a wife and a young kid coming along and my total income was the GI bill and we were living in a Quon set hut, and so there was a certain pressure, and I couldn't figure out what in heaven's name to do. One hot spring day, I retreated to the Rare Books Library in the Medical School because it was the only place that was air conditioned. In those days they didn't air condition for people, only for books. And I was sitting there saying, what can I do that is something more narrow than the cause of schizophrenia? I'd been very exposed, obviously, to Miller and Dollard's kind of learning theory and approach avoidance conflicts and stuff, and I had just finished reading Jules Masserman's article about experimental neurosis in cats, and I said, well that's very interesting. The phenomena is I'm sure correct, but I don't think he has a very parsimonious explanation for this, and I think that you can explain all of this in terms of things that affect the approach and avoidance gradients in an approach and avoidance conflict situation. That's what I designed my thesis around, the effects of alcohol on conflict behavior in the albino rat. That led to probably my being the only psychologist ever to be the subject of an editorial in the New York Daily News, under the title of "How Crazy Can Psychologists Get?" And it said like, 'we have always known that these psychologists were going around trying to prove that people were like rats, but we have now encountered one who's trying to prove that rats are like people'.

Emde: It reminds me of a story I heard recently from one of your other co-authors, or your other co-author of that textbook, Jerry Kagan, that he at Yale, I think for similar reasons of wanting to get done quickly not from an intrinsic particular interest, did a dissertation that had something to do with a conflict between Neal Miller and John Dollard in an aspect of learning theory, but he ended up sewing vaginas in female mice to create a certain frustration.

Conger: Those were fascinating days. So that's how I happened to do that dissertation. Then, of course, when I came here to Colorado, I was still interested in these, I guess you would now call it things like behavioral medicine. Like studying the effects of social experience or individual experience in the production of gastric ulcers in rats, and that's what Bill Sawrey and Gene Turrell and I did. What happened really was I was going to go out and be a clinical psychologist, and I wasn't even particularly focused on children. Although I'd had as much exposure in my training to children as I had to adults-- I guess probably a little bit more because I worked in pediatrics at Yale for awhile with Edith Jackson. She was a marvelous lady, came out here in pediatrics and psycho-analysis, you know her name.

Emde: Oh, Edie Jackson?

Conger: Edie Jackson, right. She was one of my first employers, and she was the founder of rooming-in at Yale. So I was working with her and with people in pediatrics and the department of psychiatry. What happened to both Paul and myself was, when we graduated, I went to Indiana and he went to Wisconsin and it was very much a seller's market because clinical psychology was blooming as a result of the War. There were very few of us and we sort of had our choice of jobs, which makes me very sympathetic to current students, it's a much tougher road. Anyway, both of us were assigned to teach graduate students' clinical psychology seminars, but each of us was also told to teach an undergraduate course in child psychology, which we never had. So Paul came down, I remember for Christmas vacation-- and he was still a bachelor at that time-- to Bloomington, and we started talking about what we were doing, what we were teaching, what textbooks we were using. Neither of us was very happy with our child we were learning it as we went, with our child texts, and one of us kind of made the rash statement that, Gee, we could write a book as good as these. So we sort of forgot about it until somebody from Random House called up a few months later and said, "I understand you and Doctor Mussen have written a book on child psychology and we would like to look at it." So I called up Paul and I said, you want to write this book they want to look at it. We rashly thought we would do this pretty easily.

Emde: Where were you in your career, how long had you been at

Conger: Two years out of graduate school. We were very brash really. We became more humble as we undertook, when we found out what was involved in writing this book. We just thought we needed to collect a few of our notes which we were using. But in essence it turned out that when we finally decided we would go ahead, it took over three years. The first year and half were confined solely to making an outline of how the book should be organized, because of the two things that we tried to achieve, and as a result of the influence of Yale and the Institute, and particularly, I suppose, Irvin Child. Most of the child textbooks in those days were very empirically oriented. This study, that study, the next study. Like chapter one would be physical development, chapter two would be mental development, then emotional development, and maybe chapter sixteen would be something called personality. What we wanted to do was two things: One was we wanted to write a book that was chronologically oriented, that tried to look at the interaction of the biological, the psychological and the social forces at each stage of development, and how they interacted with each other, and the effect that they had upon subsequent interactions. Implicit was the concept of antecedent consequent relationships throughout the period of development-- the idea that events at one stage of development depend on, and proceed from earlier events. And we found out that was harder to do than we thought, without being repetitious and redundant. We also discovered that a lot of the categories of things that we came up with-- we'll do this here, then we'll cover this, this, and this under that topic, and then we found out when we came to fill in the blanks and in many of the areas in our outline nobody had ever done any research. So in a way the first edition was slim because a lot of the slots weren't filled, and were filled by subsequent research. So this developmental, antecedent-consequent approach to the interaction of biological, psychological, social forces at each stage of development was an approach that we tried to organize. Which was, I think, different from any of the other texts at that time. We also tried to put--systematic theory would be too pretentious a term-- but we tried to have a kind of theoretical rationale for the way in which we looked at development. Not surprisingly, with the background that both of us had, this involved invoking learning theory, psychoanalytic theory, cultural anthropological, sociological theory and so on. We were somewhat exposed to cognitive theory, we heard something about some guy named Piaget early on. But cognitive approaches were not playing a big role at that time, anywhere really, and certainly not at Yale. One of the things I think that this raises, and which was one of the questions on this outline, was to ask what changes that you've seen, and certainly one of the changes that we've seen, and that our successive editions have reflected, is a greater cognitive emphasis in both development and psychology generally.

Emde: Just to anchor this, the year of the first edition is about what '52?

Conger: 1953, I think. This is the book right here, no '56. We started it in '53, I had just come to Colorado in the Medical School and Paul had just gone from Wisconsin to Ohio State and that's when we started it.

Emde: At that time it was called *Child Development and Personality*.

Conger: It hasn't changed since. Just added authors, with first Jerry Kagen, and then Aletha Houston, both of whom were very fortuitous additions and I think we complemented each other very well.

Emde: Jerry was added to the second or the third?

Conger: Second. By the time the first edition was through, and after the three years we'd been through, and being very young for what we were doing, and having some concern about whether the book would help or hurt our careers, we were pretty thin. I was quite happy here, at Colorado but I think Paul sort of wanted to get back to his roots either in California or the East Coast, so hoping that this book might help our careers Paul was probably more anxious about whether we were going to fumble this, were are careers going to be over before they started if we were going to bomb out on this. But I've forgotten what the context is I was talking within here. Oh, by the time we got through the book we were very close friends and we are very close friends until this day, but in terms of all this interaction, all the arguments about the content-- we remained good friends, but we really didn't care if we saw each other for, like five years. So the book was, to our delight, immediately successful. Harper started giving us a hard time about doing a new edition. Eventually we said, well we've either got to do it or say no. We were having dinner together in New York and, you know, discussing what are we going to do, what if we added a co-author? One of the things that happened is that by the time... this is a slight diversion, an anecdote but it really is relevant. By the time we essentially finished the book one night in Columbus, Ohio, we were going to celebrate but there were five passages involving issues that we hadn't settled. And I said, "Here is where reality lies, Paul," and he said, "No here is where reality lies." So we said, let's be mature about this and reach a compromise, we'll walk around the block and resolve it. These were minor issues like the relative importance of nature and nurture, and little things like that. So we ended up with five paragraphs in the book where I had a version and he had a version and we absolutely, neither of us would give in. We couldn't, so we decided that Irvin Child, of *Child Training and Personality*, that we would send these five dilemmas to Irvin Child, and whichever way he ruled, the other one would agree. Irvin, very kindly, not only did he do that, but he read the entire manuscript. But on these particular five things, this is literally true, in two instances he agreed with Paul and said he was right, I was wrong, and in two instances he said I was right and in the fifth instance, he said we were both all wet, and he wrote a paragraph, which is in this book. So we don't acknowledge him as a co-author, but he wrote one paragraph in the first edition of *Child Development and Personality*. So we decided if we got a second author, one, we could make him do most of the work on the second edition, or her, but also....

Emde: Time out. I can't resist asking, what was that paragraph about?

Conger: I can't remember. It's just buried. I wish I could remember, but I can't. I asked Irvin if he could remember when I saw him, and he couldn't remember. But it was literally true and we acknowledged him in the book. So, anyway we started making lists of possible ex-authors, and I'd suggest you know, these names, and he'd say, "Oh, I don't know." So finally, I said why don't we each write down a list of five people and see if there's any commonality. It turned out that a name that was on both of our lists was Jerry Kagan who was a few years behind us a Yale and was then at Fels. So we decided that we were in agreement about him and we would ask him if he wanted to be a co-author and he said yes. We did make him do most of the work on that edition, at least -- not writing all the chapters because we wrote our own, but he had to take responsibility for the organization and see that stuff got put together. So after the second edition we couldn't make him do any more than any of us. Then eventually, when we got to the fifth and sixth edition we decided, this is getting kind of comical, the three aging males are writing this thing, and we probably better get somebody from a slightly younger generation and preferably female to contribute something to this aging male trio. The first person we asked was Aletha Houston, and it was a marriage made in heaven. She just fit in. Her interests and the parts of development she was interested just complemented us the rest of us. Also she is very bright, very nice and a very good writer. Being able to write helps a great deal. One of the things that-- this is a slight diversion again-- but my mother I think, thought that I would become either a writer or a poet or a physician, or a minister. I think she gave up on that early, but that's what most of her forebearers had been. So I

didn't become any of those but I did end up writing about fourteen books. And I did eventually do a slim book of poetry and I did end up in medicine and probably had I gone to medical school, I probably wouldn't have ended up being the Dean of the Medical School. So you see that things all come full circle, whether you intend them to or not. But I remember when I was undergoing psychoanalysis, pretty early on, and Jule Eisenbud was my analyst. He said, "Well, there's one thing, fortunately, we're not going to have to analyze." And I said, "Oh, what's that?" And he said, "Writer's block." I always liked to write, and maybe it was a little easier to write even textbooks, when you started out to be a writer.

Emde: Did you always know you wanted to write as a child? Yes, I think so. I really did, yes. It was always pleasurable activity.

Conger: Yes, I think I did. I thought I wanted to be a poet. I tried once to write a novel, but it was so bad that I couldn't stand it. The great thing about poetry is that you can write, you can have an "I" in poetry, but you can't have an "I" in writing novels. I've had all my attempts to write novels and short stories, I had this interesting complex character who bore a strange resemblance to myself, as the central character. Then I had all these cardboard figures that this person interacted with. It was the direct opposite of my wife, who in addition to being a good actress, is a good playwright. She started telling me about the plot of a play she was writing and the interaction of the people, and I said, "Well then what happens next?" And she said, "Well I have to wait to find out how he affects her and she affects him." She could look through the eyes of all of the characters.

Emde: In the imaginative world.

Conger: Right, but I decided early on that I'd better stick to poetry and then subsequently to professional writing. No novels or short stories.

Emde: And yet there must be something about your love of metaphors and sensibilities to different sensory experiences that translated to psychology and to your writing in psychology.

Conger: I think that's actually right,

Emde: And your ability to, which is considerable, to project yourself into someone else's experience and their experience in a sense into yours through empathic processes and so on, particularly the young people and adolescents.

Conger: So what happened is, that's kind of how Paul and I got into, both of us, into child psychology and child development. We didn't intend it that way -- we both were never had a course labeled child psychology or child development, but we both were fascinated. Paul more than I, was interested in the effect of socialization forces. I guess I was more -- in terms of external forces -- more fascinated by the individual and the family influences and so forth. Paul, right from the start, had a broad kind of socialization orientation. But both of us had this interest in personality development as a major thing, and it was the reason for studying all these interactions with biological, psychological, and social forces, which as we viewed it, took place according to some principles of learning -- to determine how the person came out. What kind of a person they became and why. So we had this strong interest in personality development. And that I think we can credit a lot to Irvin Child for providing a framework within which we could do it. I think his influence is certainly pervasive in the first edition.

Emde: You had what, six editions of the Child Psychology?

Conger: It's now going into the eighth edition.

Emde: It's going into eighth?

Conger: Right, you see we've got seven editions that are out. I believe that that's correct.

Emde: Forgive me I didn't even realize that there was one in progress. I thought you had completed it.

Conger: We finished the seventh edition with Paul and Jerry and Aletha and myself. And we sort of all of us collectively gradually decided that it was time really to move onto a new generation. So we looked around -- and Jerry was largely instrumental -- we came up with Nora Newcombe who is a bright younger person who was very interested in doing it. So she has really taken responsibility for the eighth edition and we're sort of bowing out. We'll help in whatever ways are helpful to her, but that's sort of it. Then after that it will be her book.

Emde: So from 1956 to 1990, which I note is the copyright date of the seventh edition, you had these seven editions. In that sweep, it's an enormous sweep, but also you are very hardworking because that is a lot of editions. You didn't wait ten years to do the next edition, obviously. You began working almost on the subsequent edition as soon as or before the previous was out."

Conger: Harper would have preferred us to do it more frequently than that, but we figured we had the rest of our careers to pursue, and so we really tried to come out with a new edition about every five years. Of course, publishers like you to come out about every three years.

Emde: So it's more dense than that actually.

Conger: Well, let's see, we really started almost in '53, so 50 to 90 is forty years and you divide forty by it's about five years in between each one.

Emde: Yes, I guess it is.

Conger: So then on my adolescence book

Emde: Before we get to that just a quick question which I think you could answer probably is that when you got to the sixth edition, how different did that look, what are the areas let's say that were gone into with the sixth edition, that weren't in the first edition and vice versa. What are the areas that were dropped, what change adjust in a headline way.

Conger: In a headline kind of away, the largest change was a major effect of cognitive theory and cognitive development. So that became much more prominent. Learning theory, which for us was a kind of a Miller Dollard learning theory, became much less prominent. The emphasis and the incredible amount of research that was going into infancy is another. We talked about infancy, and we tried to look at all of the interaction of forces, but back in those days, blanks that were there before the explosion of research and theory in infancy and early childhood -- the data simply weren't there. Now as you know, because that's your particular research interest, it's just exploded. So I think that's changed enormously. I think that one thing that took a long time changing and is a particular interest of mine is that for a long time after research -- you know, really good rigorous research and really good developmental theory -- began to take place in infancy and early childhood, and even to some extent middle childhood, adolescence was still considered a really mushy, muddy area where there really wasn't anything very good in terms of empirical research or theory. One of the things was that you weren't seeing the dramatic focus on adolescents in society that we've seen since. I really don't know why. But at any rate, it, I think was treated seriously the last of any of the stages of development. And certainly the emphasis on adolescence has gotten increasingly strong over that period of time and it's become a major interest of mine. When I did do the first edition of *Adolescence and Youth* book, I didn't even know if I was writing a textbook. I just wrote a book on adolescence, and people said it was a textbook. So I put in review questions to be asked and so to make it usable as a text. People said why the heck would you want to write about adolescence, that's not "in", and it wasn't in for a long time. What's amused me in the last ten years is that now everybody is, as the kids would say, into adolescence. Foundations that you couldn't interest earlier, NIMH, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development nobody was interested. Now all of a sudden everybody is interested, and now adolescence has become a respectable research domain, as well as a very important stage in life and a major preoccupation of our society. So I think there's a greater emphasis on that. Another thing that's evolved over the years is the influence of a kind of ecological thinking on child development, and that shows increasing importance. The whole field is really, just almost unrecognizable compared to the amount of knowledge that was available in the first edition of our book. The field wasn't, for one thing, especially theoretically oriented; there were a few people who had their own particular conceptual approaches, but basically, it was kind of dominated by empirical studies of mental development, physical development, social development and

Emde: Many descriptive studies.

Conger: Many descriptive studies, right. So I think those are things that sort of stand out. I think one of the things that certainly is getting more attention and could be considered as a respectable part of our concerns-- and in SRCD you know more about this than I do-- is that a research society, it's important for researchers also to address questions of social policy and the needs of infants, children and adolescents in our society. And the social policy that we should try to in some way foster is optimal development of all children, which is certainly something that is not taking place. Maybe there's a little more hope now than there's been in the last dozen years. So I think concern with social policy and social values is playing a bigger role than it did way back then.

Emde: That's interesting now too there seems to be a particular interest now, as they say on both sides aisle, about values.

Conger: What interested me, I was becoming increasingly interested in adolescence when I resigned as Dean and Vice-President -- really a year earlier than I had planned, because I had been invited to come to the Center for Advanced Study for a year and I figured that was a once in a lifetime opportunity. And also just that morning when I was to receive the invitation Dorothy Townsend, my secretary, had come in -- and I had been doing this for nine years -- and I said, "You know I'm beginning to feel like a broken record. People come in and say, "You won't believe this incredible problem that we have." And then some department chair would come in and they'd say, "You won't believe the incredible behavior of this other chairman!" And the worst thing is that I would find myself saying, "Yeah I think we went through that in '63 and again in '67 and '68."

Emde: You were getting into your going off to the center.

Conger: Oh yeah that's right. Then about ten minutes later, she came in with the morning mail and said, "In view of what you were just telling me, maybe you ought to read this letter on top of the stack." It was an invitation to be a fellow at the Center. So I was so superstitious that I called up and accepted, I didn't dare trust it to the US mails. I called up the President of the University who at that time was Fred Thilme, and I said "Fred you better start looking for a new Vice-President because, we better not talk about it publicly yet because I have budget hearings next week, but I'm going to go be a fellow at the Center next year." And he said, "What are you going to do?" And I stopped a minute and I said, "Oh, I'm going to write a book I've wanted to write for 15 years and never had time to." And he said, "What's that?" And I said, "I'm going to write a book about adolescence." So that was what happened.

Emde: Well this is, I was hoping we'd get to that, because we covered the Child Development textbook and now we're into another major gift of the field that you've had which is a textbook and an original treatise on adolescence. How many editions did that go through John?

Conger: That's four editions, it's in the fourth edition right now.

Emde: So those took place also over a span of 20 years or so?

Conger: No, it first came out in, I started working on it at the Center in '70 and it came out about '73 or '74.

Emde: So we're twenty years later.

Conger: So now it's, again, about 5 to 6 years in between editions. So for awhile I had -- first I did two editions by myself, and then Ann Peterson came in on the third edition. She was my assistant director at the MacArthur Foundation when I was on loan from the Medical School to help start their program in health and mental health research. But she moved to Penn State and got so busy being a Department Chairman, and a Dean and a Provost, that she dropped out. So the fourth edition I did by myself. But now I have a bright young woman and a very nice person also, Nancy Galambos, who is at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. And she's going to take a major responsibility for the fifth edition, and if there is a sixth edition I'll turn it over to her. So this will be my last. It's in progress right now, we're about four chapters into that.

Emde: I remember a conversation not too long ago where you said you weren't going to do it.

Conger: Well Nancy is doing a lion's share of it.

Emde: Well that's terrific. You've covered a lot of trends, when we were talking before, over that span with child development you included adolescence and now this is called Adolescence and Youth. Would you add anything with a focus on Adolescence and Youth, in terms of the things that were added or subtracted or changed over the span of those 20 years or are changing, if you wish to put it that way.

Conger: Well the greatest changes have been in terms of societal values and their effect upon adolescent values and also on adolescent problems that adolescents confront. In the I first edition and the current edition, the first book is called Adolescence and Youth, I and I guess I learned that distinction from Ken Kenniston. But the subtitle was -- this is when I didn't even know it was going to be a textbook or not, other people I decided it was a textbook. But it was called Psychological Development in a Changing World. That's been the subtitle ever since then. I have, I think, tried to I reflect the effects of social change both directly on adolescents and also on other aspects of society, other influences that directly affect adolescents. As, for example, the influence of a changing world on parents and, consequently, on changing the relationship of parents to children and to adolescents, and what adolescents and their parents have to deal with in a changing world. And my interests all along have been, what is the nature of the complex interacting forces in development and certainly in adolescence it is illustrated very dramatically, there are major interactions of biological, psychological and social forces in a very clear and highlighted way. That's been a major focus. We happily are learning much more since the first edition of the Adolescence book, which was many years after the first edition of the child book. But we're also learning a lot more about the physical development in adolescents, hormonal influences, this kind of thing. I think we're learning to conceptualize cognitive development in a good deal more sophisticated fashion, and so forth. But I've always, being a clinician -- I think I've always tried to cover everything from physical changes to moral development, the whole business -- but being a clinician as well, I think that I've always had a major interest in the interaction of parents and children. What's the role of parent-child relationships in adolescents? I think there's a lot of good research going on now. I don't think it conflicts much with the way you could conceptualize it early on, and I don't think the basic conceptualizations have changed much, but there's much more sophisticated detail about the nature of it. That's one thing I would observe about my book, and I also dealt a lot more with changing values, with social problems, with delinquency, drugs, psychological problems... I don't think any earlier textbooks on adolescence had sections on psychological and psychophysiological problems in adolescence. There were books about it, but not as part of a general textbook. Now, it's sort of incorporated as a legitimate part of the field of adolescence, whether you're interested specifically in mental health aspects of adolescence or not. What I think I have found myself increasingly focusing on, and increasingly concerned about, ever since I started working on that first edition of the adolescence book, is the problems that adolescents and parents and children are confronted with in the changing world. I think that America, in particular, talks a great deal about the importance of children and our devotion to children and to the family, and yet we recognize it in very strange ways. I think what I have tried, outside of my purely scientific or clinical interest in adolescence, what I have particularly tried to have some impact on over the years, is getting society to recognize that children and adolescents and the family need a far better deal than they're getting. You've heard a lot about devotion to the family, but it's taken some very strange turns in terms of the way that it's been defined. Certainly that's an area which in recent years I suppose I've put more effort into than anything else. I mean it was the subject of my Presidential address to the American Psychological Association. I tried with people like Lee Schorr and Ed Ziegler to have an impact on governmental and social policy during those years. When I served on President Carter's and Rosalynn Carter's, President's Commission on Mental Health, I'd say the principal contribution that I made to this -- and was helped a lot by Betty Hamburg who was a leading staff member on the Commission -- was to make sure the needs and interests of children and adolescents and families didn't get short shrift in the final Report, and I don't think it did. In fact, it got to be kind of a joke in the Commission meetings, and Mrs. Carter last time I saw her, kidded me about this. They would say, "Well now, in terms of the interest of children and families " and I'd say, "Children, adolescents and families." But you know, it was kind of discouraging for quite a period there because, for example, I think that we worked very hard for a year on the President's Commission on Mental Health. We were a very diverse group, ranging in age from 20 to 70, and with about every ethnic, social, etc. group represented, and I think the Report, and it's accompanying volumes, was a really very helpful contribution. It did get translated with the President's endorsement into the Mental Health Aystems Act. President Carter who is a fiscal conservative said he would allocate five million dollars to get this going. Just about that same time Lee Schorr and her colleagues and staff came up with this wonderful three volume report, Better Health for Our Children; A National Strategy, on the health needs including mental health and health needs very broadly defined, for children in our society, which was commissioned by Congress and submitted to them. Then Mr. Reagan came into office, and within 90 days the Mental Health Systems Act had been reversed by about the same majority that it had initially been approved by.

And the report of Lee Schorr's Select Panel for the Promotion of Child Health, it sort of faded away, too. I mean, they both had impacts, but the impact that they could have had could have been much greater, much faster.

Emde: That reminds me, that was Rosalynn Carter's major initiative and her major focus.

Conger: It was really was.

Emde: As First Lady, she was in mental health and she has continued that.

Conger: It really was genuine. She wasn't saying, well now I'm the President's wife I have to find some project. She was a volunteer in State Hospitals in Georgia. She went around practically being an aide and doing things for patients. She had a lot to do with Carter's efforts as Governor, to improve mental health care in Georgia. She went back and reported to him and sparked the efforts to improve the mental health system. I think she is really a very remarkable person. I must say I was amazed to find myself on this Commission, because I had absolutely no idea that this was in the wind. But one day, sitting in my office having to do a whole bunch of busy work that needed to be done but was very unsatisfying, and it was about an hour until lunch time and I said, well, I'm tired of doing all this Mickey Mouse stuff, I'm just going to sit back and read the New York Times until lunch. So I put my feet up on the desk and was reading the New York Times when my secretary Mrs. Townsend, my colleague, friend, and indispensable assistant all of these years buzzed me and said, "Well, somebody says that the White House is on the telephone and that Mrs. Carter would like to talk to you." And I wasn't sure it wasn't a joke. So I picked up the phone and I said, "Hello", and this voice -- no intermediaries no secretaries no anybody -- this voice said, "Dr. Conger?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "This is Rosalynn Carter, I'd like to ask you to serve on my Mental Health Commission." That was the beginning of a year of eighteen hour days, but it was a really very rewarding experience. And I have great admiration for her as a human being and a very important person.

Emde: One wonders, I was reflecting as you were talking and thinking now of Hillary Clinton's initiatives and focus and commitment and new interest. I was reminded of the Gessell principle, I think it is, of reciprocal interweaving. So maybe those things do have a way of coming back.

Conger: Well I think so and I hope so. And the reciprocal, in a way I got indirectly involved in that also because a major mentor for both Hillary Clinton and Donna Shelalah the new Secretary of Health and Human Services, was Marion Wright Edelman, and the head of the Children's Defense Fund and somebody whom I highly admire. Well, when I was President-elect of the American Psychological Association -- the President-elect is the person who gets to pick the major outstanding outside speaker who is not in the field of psychology. It can be anybody, it can be a senator, it could be anyone. So the person that I asked to give the major address that year was Marion Wright Edelman and she accepted, which I was pleased about. But I wasn't in Toronto to introduce her because I had a heart attack about two months before AP A. Just about the time I was going to work for the MacArthur Arthur Foundation. So I'm seeing the fine hand of Marion Wright Edelman in a lot of current efforts.

Emde: Well we might come back later to public policy after we cover some other aspects of your career and perspectives. Well maybe at this point John, if you'd care to, share with us some of your empirical and clinical contributions in your creative work that you think are particularly important or at least that you would like to highlight, as you look back on your career.

Conger: OK. Well, the interest shifted over the years and I've already covered what happened with my dissertation at Yale so my most immediate subsequent research really was, in those days I guess we would have called it psychophysiological, or psychosomatic -- now we talk probably in terms of behavioral medicine. I think that the research that Bill Sawrey in particular, and to some extent Gene Turrell and I did on the effects of psychological and social experiences in the production of gastric ulcers in rats was kind of a precursor of other research on how psychological and social influences can affect physiological phenomenon, and I think that I'm very pleased with that and the kind of research that it subsequently it has led to. And another example is that the methods used in the three experiments that went into my dissertation on The Effects of Alcohol in Conflict Behavior, really became in those early years of testing anti-anxiety drugs and so forth, became a model for ways in which to do such tests. I guess my most immediate shifts in terms of research then were on -- and I guess reflecting my developing interest in problems confronting adolescents and youth -- were this major five-year study that I did along with Herb Gaskill, who was the psychiatry chairman and Will Miller, a psychologist at that time at Denver University, and subsequently, President

of Drake University, and Bob Rainey and a couple of other people, on the effects of psychological and psychophysiological factors in accidents. We started out with a grant from the Department of Defense, which wanted to know why airmen were having so many accidents, and could we look at the psychological and physical and physiological factors that might be involved. And we said, well, we didn't know if there were any or if we would come up with any, but if they wanted us to look at it we would. So we subsequently did a major study using Air Force personnel and were given a building at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital. One of the limitations that we had in terms of developmental influences, we had to just get these airmen at one point and time, we couldn't really look at developmental factors. So when that study was finished we decided that we needed a longitudinal study, and I wanted to look both at that and other factors that would be related to adolescent problems generally, and what factors could predict these problems. So what we really set out to do was a major study that would follow kids using partly current and partly retrospective data in terms of things like personality characteristics, follow them kindergarten on through the ninth grade. And we had available a battery of tests that we were able to give we had teacher ratings and school records and I don't think --I think we would have had a hard time probably doing that kind of research these days. But we got permission, it took two years to get it, but we got permission from every school in Denver, and every parent but about three in Denver. So we followed this cohort of kids through nine years and then we looked at what happened to them in adolescence. It was a major study in terms of accidents, but we then we also looked in terms of delinquency and we started to try to do it on terms of development of psychiatric and, psychological problems, but the data collection there just got too complex to really ever finish it. I think one of the things that was conceptually somewhat new about this up road was, we tried not only to look at differences between delinquents and non-delinquents and the factors that could have influenced this and we did have a very careful matching approach because every kid that became delinquent in adolescence was matched with a kid who didn't. There was a kid who had gone to the same schools, in most cases grew up on the same block in Denver, had parents in similar occupations, and same race and everything you could think of to measure. But then we had a hypothesis that both with respect to personality characteristics and also to these other things, that you wouldn't have just differences between delinquents and nondelinquents, but the kinds of personality characteristics that would distinguish delinquents and nondelinquents might vary depending upon the socioeconomic status and the intelligence level, broadly defined, of the kids. And we found out that the kind of factors that distinguished, say, above average IQ, upper socioeconomic status, the personality characteristics distinguishing delinquents from nondelinquents in that group in a number of instances, were different from those of lower socioeconomic status and average IQ, or what not, these combinations. We started to write this up in articles, but, it was so complex, because everything depended upon something else, that we eventually ended up having to do a book on it called *Personality, Social Class, and Delinquency*. So I think that is another area that was a major concern for quite a long time and it I think played a role in the development of the stuff we did on, accidents. The same thing with these set of kids. Accident research was a late bloomer in terms of serious researchers having an interest in it. It was largely in the hands of, sometimes very effective, but well meaning people who had stereotypes about accidents and how you prevented them. So then a number of us started doing serious research on factors in accidents and we did find a number of psychological, physical, and psychophysiological factors which distinguished among airmen and also kids. It came at a time when, just about that time, we formed the first study section at NIMH that concerned injury control or accidents. I was there the first time they had a President's Committee on Traffic Safety and I chaired their research committee. I mean, there were only a handful of people that were researchers that you could recruit. So I got very involved. There were a handful of other psychologists -- pretty much from the early 50's on -- combined with emergency room physicians and whatnot, we tried very early on to get Detroit to have an interest in having safer cars and having seat belts and so forth. We got not much of a hearing, about the highest we could get was some assistant vice-president to talk to in Detroit.

Emde: Is this the late 50's, early 60's?

Conger: This was middle and late 50's. So it was an interesting thing for me when suddenly all this stuff about accidents and design of cars became politically acceptable. And General Motors was found to be investigating the private life -- the blameless private life -- of Ralph Nader -- "individual abused by big corporation." This provided the opening for Congressman Roberts who had been trying to get some legislation passed for years without much success, a chance to get some legislation passed, and it led to the setting up of the Highway Safety Administration in the brand new Department of Transportation, and to my involvement. So it was kind of a poetic justice for me. I remember how I first heard about this. Trista and I were driving to the home of Bob Stearns, former President of the University of Colorado, for cocktails one evening and we were listening to the five o'clock news on the Denver radio and it was droning on when this voice said, "Today President Johnson has announced the appointment of Doctor

John Conger, Dean of the University of Colorado School of Medicine as a member of the new Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council." And Trista said, "You didn't tell me that President Johnson " and I said, "President Johnson didn't tell me, Trista, this is the first I've heard of it." So I ended up being Vice-Chairman of this Commission for a three-year term, and I eventually ended up being a chair of the sub-committee on relationships with the private sector. So whereas ten years before I hadn't been able to get in the door of an assistant vice-president, all of a sudden I'm having dinner at the Automotive Club of Detroit, with the Presidents of General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, Firestone, International Harvester, etc. etc. And we got listened to a lot more. So that was kind of an interesting, and I think useful, experience. I think cars are the better for it.

Emde: Your interests, and more than interests your creative influences in public policy and various administrative roles have been hinted at already in the narrative and maybe this is the time to flush out that part of your career. I'd be interested starting with how you got into administrative roles in medical school. Had you I think gone from Yale to Indiana, well actually the Navy....

Conger: Yale to Indiana, to the Navy, back to Indiana then here.

Emde: Oh I see, that's where I got confused. Back to Indiana, and then from Indiana you were recruited by Herbert Gaskill to the Department of Psychiatry to head up the Division of Psychology in the Medical School, is that right?

Conger: Yes, what happened was that the President of Indiana -- the first year of medical school at Indiana University was on Bloomington Campus and the rest was in Indianapolis -- he wanted to bring the campuses closer together, and he thought one way to do this was to have somebody from each of the basic sciences go for a year to the Medical School. He decided to include psychology in this, and so the department chairman told us about this plan and said who wants to volunteer to go to Indianapolis, and nobody put up their hands. I had been teaching one year there and I said, "Well, what duties would be involved?" And they said, "Well you're kind of ambassador at large I don't think there are any clearly defined duties." So I said, well gee maybe I can get my dissertation written up, maybe I'll have a better chance to prepare my classes for when I come back, and I'll get some good clinical experience I'm quite sure. So I consulted Trista and she wasn't eager to go to Indianapolis, it's very flat, as opposed to Bloomington which is the foothills.

Emde: This involved a move?

Conger: This involved a move, we had to rent a house. We were in an apartment, a former Army barracks apartment at Indiana. So we decided that we would do it. Well, I had been there barely three months when I got a call from the Navy saying that their equivalent of a computer in those days said that I was the only person that could fit this particularly secret billet that they had in mind, that you had to volunteer for to find out what it was. They wanted somebody who had been skipper of a ship, who had at least one ribbon, who was in clinical psychology, who had worked in a medical setting, who was familiar with working with young people, etc. etc. And they said of course there a number of other billets available such as Guam, Saipan and Ikasura -- this is the Korean War and I had neglected to resign from the reserves, so there I was, and they said these other billets were also available but we had planned to fill those primarily from the involuntary list. So I said, "I read you loud and clear, I hereby volunteer." Then I found out that what they wanted was to set up a mental health program or counseling service for midshipmen at Annapolis. So that's what I did for a couple of years. Then I came back to Indiana, and I had a choice of either going back to the graduate school or the medical school. By that time Herb Gaskill, chairman of psychiatry there, and subsequently chairman at Colorado when you, Bob, became a resident, recruited me to come along with him out here. So that's how I came and that's how I became head of the Division of Clinical Psychology. Really what happened, it was during that time that I became more and more interested in developmental psychology as such. I think that I was undoubtedly influenced a lot by the fact that Paul and I were doing and had done the book and all of a sudden I began to think I'm as much a developmental psychologist as I am this post World War II breed of clinical psychologist. Also I had recruited everybody, counting at the time believe it or not now, there were counting secretaries, interns, whatnot, there were over 31 people in the Psychology Division in the Department of Psychiatry. But those were also the birth years of clinical psychology nationally. So I had been on about every commission on things like should there be something called an internship in clinical psychology? What should the curriculum be? So both nationally and in terms of having hired most of the people that were in the division at Colorado, I began to feel like a broken record. And everybody has heard me and my views before, both generally in

psychology, and also here. I was finding -- this is sort of ironic -- I felt I was also taking too much time to administer this Division. I'd also had an opportunity, I had been asked to apply for a career research development scientist award, which had quite a lot of freedom in them in those days. I was asked to apply for it and I decided that I would. What happened was that I did resign as head of the Psychology Division but then Bob Glaser who was the Dean said, "Now look, I didn't know you wanted to get out of this." And I said, "Well, for one thing, I'm a broken record, secondly I want more time for research, and three I'm going to apply for this career award." And he said, "Well in the meantime why don't " At that time there was only one associate dean for admissions, student affairs, faculty affairs, I mean it was the Associate Dean, now there's about four or five of them. But he said, "Reg Fitz left to be Dean at New Mexico, and you've got a good background in terms of young people and you know about how you do research on this stuff of how you select people, and you've been on the Admissions Committee," (which I had been), and he said, "If you'll be Associate Dean, it would take not more than half your time, and I'll guarantee that you have the other half of your time free for your research interests in developmental, etc., etc." And, innocently, I said, well OK. That's sort of how I got into medical school administration. Well, what happened is that I did this for two years and if you cared about the students it was more like full time. Again, almost everything I've done in my life in some way or another, has involved young people. At Annapolis, it was counseling, and after the Admiral decided he trusted me, I also ended up teaching the second-class course in leadership. Here's this Mickey Mouse "Hooligans" Navy Lieutenant from World War II and this Air Force bomber pilot Colonel and we're teaching leadership at Annapolis. But everything I've done has somehow in one way or another involved young people, whether it had to do with research, administration or clinical, or whatnot. So I did care about the students, and I think we had a very good relationship, but I said this isn't going to work. So after two years I said to the Dean, I'll give you time to find a replacement, but I'm going to be just a developmental and clinical psychologist. At that point -- this was in May two years later, May of '63, I'd gone over to be Associate Dean in '61 -- Bob Glaser the Dean and Vice-President suddenly up and announced that we was going back to his Alma Mater at Harvard to pull the Harvard Hospitals together, a major task I might say. And he was leaving in a month, so what are we going to do? I guess that they figured that the only person who had a vague idea of what went on in the Dean and Vice-President's office, since I was next door, was me. So they said, would I do this on an acting basis if I was asked, and I said, yes I will but not beyond September, because that's when this grant would become available. I'd have to get serious about that. But came September, and Bill Wadell, who was Chairman of Surgery and head of the search committee for Dean came down to my office and he said "We've been talking to various candidates for Dean and Vice-President and we're not overwhelmed, and we don't know how, but you seem to be running the place OK, we don't know how, but it seems to be working, so what we want to know, since it takes a long time to process a candidate, is would you be willing to take the job if asked on a "permanent" basis?" And I said, "Absolutely not, under no circumstances" would I do it. But two months later, I was the Dean and Vice-President, and it was the only recommendation of the faculty and I got a lot of urging from the medical students, in fact the graduated medical students had a dinner in San Francisco and they all petitioned me because I'd been their Associate Dean for Students, and they petitioned me to do it. It's really interesting, because here I was, I wasn't a physician, but people in the basic sciences were coming around and saying, "John you have a moral obligation to take this job." And I said, "Well why is that?" And they said, "Well you're basically a basic scientist, but you seem to understand clinicians. And not to be critical, I would certainly take my wife or daughter to see these people, but I don't think they really understand science as such. So I think it's very important that you take this job." People from the clinical side would come in and say, "You know you really have a moral obligation to take this job," and I said, "Oh, why is that?" And they said, "Well you're a clinician, but you seem to understand how basic scientists think, and they think that you understand, and we're trying to have close relationships and we're trying to break barriers between the basic and the clinical sciences." And believe it or not, they were trying to have equalized salaries in those days, and that's long gone. But we weren't so commercially minded in those days. So between the students... And then there had been quite a battle between the medical school and the town physicians and the City and what not. Then people in the Medical Society started pressuring me to take it, and I finally said, "Oh well, the hell with it." So I did, and I think it was a very interesting period in terms of the development of medical education. I mean it makes me feel like I'm 110. But believe it or not, those were the days when basic science departments were pretty well established, but clinical departments were really often headed by, and the faculty often consisted of, part-time people who had a practice in town and came out to teach. As the research explosion started in the 60's and the complexity of medical education and medical practice and the whole business increased exponentially, obviously these things became a full time job. This was very hard for some people in the community to understand. "Why can't I be the chairman of surgery?" Well being chairman of surgery was beginning to be presiding over a multi-million dollar complex operation. I think one of the things that happened

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Emde: Faculty too, by that way. Wasn't that true?

Conger: Absolutely.

Emde: It was a transition time to requiring full, full-time faculty instead of part-time faculty throughout the medical schools.

Conger: That's right. So there was quite a tension when I came into the job. In fact at my first meeting with the Board of Regents they said, "Well we want to tell you, the first three things we want you to accomplish in your first year; we want you to solve the town-? problem, we want you to make the hospital budget come in under the allowance for the budget, and I can't remember what the third thing was.

Emde: Parking?

Conger: That came later. And they said, "If there's anything educationally you want to do, that's OK with us too." So they want you to solve the problems with the Board of Health and the Hospital, and the Medical Society and the Mayor -- and aside from that Mrs. Lincoln, how did you like the play? Instead of hurting me (not being an M.D.) I think, let's say with the Medical Society, for example, I really think it helped that here I was, "this Ph.D.", as they eventually said in some citation they gave me, I think during that period of transition, it emphasized, if you've got a Ph.D. who is going to be running this, it must be that it's kind of a complex educational institution. Another thing I think that was helpful to me within the School, was that as Associate Dean, I figured my job was to be the advocate for the students. When they came around and said, we know DNA and RNA, which were new in those days, all are very exciting, but we don't need to hear it from every department. In biochemistry we hear about the great breakthroughs, and again in anatomy and every department was teaching this DNA and RNA all over again. Before my relationships as an advocate for students and the curriculum, I had been quietly functioning over in the Psychiatry Department, and I wasn't part of any clique or group or anything. I had the same kind of relationship as the representative of the needs of students, with every department. So I don't think I was viewed as part of any group or coalition, or some group pushing a particular point of view. So it gave me really a great deal of freedom, and I must say, the Search Committee were supposed to come up with three names, and they decided they were going to come up with only one name. So clearly I was starting with the support of the faculty. I do remember I'd been Dean for less than 8 hours when I suddenly discovered that a major budget proposal was due the next day downtown in the State budget office. Then 24 hours after that I was supposed to be in Atlanta, Georgia for a meeting of all American medical school deans on the problems of administration. I remember running into Doug Bond who is a psychiatrist and a good friend of Herb Gaskill, and whom you knew, who was a member of my "subgroup". I will never forgive "group dynamics" type psychologists who form individual groups and then appoint a recorder reports to the plenary session, where the recorder gets to give their views, not what went on in the subgroups. But for some reason that's how they set it up. There were only 88 medical school Deans in the whole country at that time, and the average life expectancy at that time was three years of survival. And by surviving seven, I doubled my life expectancy. But, anyway, I remember Doug Bond was in my little group, which we rapidly got tired of, not being mixed up with the other little groups. But he sat next to me, and he was the only Dean I knew and he said, "Say, John, are you having trouble with the faculty?" And I said, "Well not really, I've been Dean for only 24 hours and I was the nominee of the faculty, so I really can't say that I've had any problems." And he said, "Well you will, you will, because you're a different person now, you may think you're still John Conger, but you're now an authority figure, and faculties don't like authority figures, so you're bound to have trouble." And I said, "Well that's comforting." And he said, "Do you suppose it would help if we could get them all psychoanalyzed, get department chairmen all psychoanalyzed?" Now while I'm trying to think of what to say to that, he said, "No, that's not a good idea, it wouldn't work, and at least now we can trade on their guilt." Somebody asked me, you know I was interviewed by the papers and the University of Colorado paper did a big long piece, in the course of which they asked me, "What was your preparation for running a major medical center, your administrative experience?" And I said, "Well, really, it's on the job learning, and there really isn't any particular preparation, besides the fact that I'd been a faculty at a number " They said, "Well what about your administrative experience?" So I said, "Well the only thing really that comes close -- due to all these strange sets of circumstances in the Navy in World War II, in a period of a month, I went from being a communications officer to being the Executive Officer of my ship, to being the Captain of my ship, to being the Division Commodore of a Division of five destroyer escorts and 1200 men, at a time that I was 22 or 23 years old. And all the other captains under me out ranked me." But I said, "That's the closest I can come to having any major administrative experience." I said, of course, there was one major difference, and

that is that when you're on the bridge of a ship at 2:00 in the morning and you say "All ships come right to 090, execute", immediately all ships turn right to 090. When you tell the faculty, all faculty member will turn right to 090, one goes north, one goes south, one goes east, one goes west, most of them stand there and stare at you.

Emde: I think that illustrates, I remember I came to my residency during the time just before your transition from Associate Dean to Dean. Then I was there during the later part of my residency and of course beginning my career when you were Dean of the Medical School, and what I remember distinctly was your remarkable capacities which were freely talked about, for diplomacy and fairness. You were really trusted, there was a pervasive kind of trusting attitude, of course there were fights that you experience but over all people couldn't attack that part of things. Also your diplomatic skills were palpable and much in evidence combined with the sense of humor we've heard a little bit about, just now again illustrated. I remember meetings where you would cut through a lot of fog and angst with some rather disarming kinds of humorous comments. One of the ones that stuck with me forever, is equal with sort of casually asking you how things were going expecting some kind of soporific bomb and you would say, "Well I guess they're going pretty well, I'm just here sliding down the razor blade of life." On one or more' occasion you would be able to use the humor to do that. Also I remember talking with you about administrative pressures how did you stand the stress, and several things that also have stuck with me. One of them I would just ask you to reflect on during these times, because the medical school it seemed to me being a department chair and the administrative structure for years has struck me as being really bad, in that there were fiefdoms set up among department chairs. Even today unlike sometimes a real academic institution in the university, chairs are often given this position essentially for life, or they think they are, and they build up loyalties and big families and really instead of having a rotational system where people feel there 's an obligation and do something. A structure that would foster, that people who take these power struggles, they become part of their identities. Here you are in the middle of this as an administrator. I know you reflected on some personal capacity. Here you are Dean and Vice-President of a university, how did you avoid this "Killing you in three years, II as you said earlier?

Conger: Well, I think... I was invited to, I got some award from "Psychologists in Administration," which is not exactly how I would define myself. But I had to go down to Florida to give a talk on my psychology of management and I said, I think I'm the wrong guy, I didn't study the psychology of management, but I'll tell you my views if you want. I may be an impostor for this award, but I'll tell you what my belief is about administration and several things about which I've given advice, like to Ann Petersen in her meteoric rise in academic administration, things I've sort of tried to forewarn her about. But I think there are some initial things that are helpful. One, and most important, you have to take the job very seriously, because it's an important position in a university, which is a very important institution in our society. To not take the position seriously is being very unfair to the purposes of the university, but what's important is while you take the job seriously, you don't take yourself seriously as a temporary occupant of this job. I mean you're there to do the best job that you can and there are things that you can do to make things function better, advancement in education or opportunities people have to grow and develop, which is what you really are, the traffic cop for people being able to grow and develop. But don't confuse yourself with the job. I've always known this job could end tomorrow and I can go back to being John Conger and I'm a developmental psychologist and I'll be me just as much the day after. And the people who merge their identity with the job ignore several things, and one is that all jobs come to an end, either happily or in worst cases very unhappily, and then people are really left adrift.

Emde: And often if you do it well, it comes to an end unhappily.

Conger: Right. Also "know when to hold them and know when to fold them", I think that's really very important for people. I think another thing that being a psychologist may help with a little bit, where you're job as a psychologist is to sort of stand back a little bit from society and look at the forces that are operating, it helps you realize -- remember this was during the 1960's which was a very turbulent period in our society, especially the later 60's -- that if you do a bad job you can certainly mess things up, that's very easy to do. But no matter how good a job you are attempting to do, or are capable of doing, there are larger social forces than yourself that are going to influence the outcome. So when things are going well it's not, "Oh boy, look at my accomplishment." Or when things are going badly, "Look at what a disaster." If you realize that you are simply part of larger social forces, you can sometimes advance the cause, or you can certainly mess it up very easily, but you are still part of a larger social period. And the 60's were a period of incredible social change, and the responsibilities that you had to take as a health

sciences center, in terms of equal opportunity for students, in terms of the great temporary faith that the American public had if only you could appropriate enough money for research, magic will happen. And the changing relationships of this institution, the University, which is really very essential in our society. When you have people all zinging darts at each other, as was happening in the late 60's, the fact that you're in the cross fire of a lot of these darts, is simply an indication of how important a health sciences center and a university are in this society. If it weren't very important, all the darts wouldn't be sailing over your head. There was a time in there too, often as we look back on it, people talk wistfully about one aspect of the time in terms of the cornucopia that was coming from the Federal Government to particularly health sciences, but academic institutions and research, generally. Somebody asked me in 1965, "If you could have three wishes what would they be?" And one of my wishes was that we would have two months in which the Federal Government didn't come around and say, you are the center of 1/3 of the United States and we are developing a program in "X", so we would like you to accept these dollars to do this program, and I said, I would really like a couple of months where somebody didn't come by from the Federal Government to want to put up money for us to start a new program, because then I have the obligation of continuing it. And you weren't able to say, "Oh that's nice, but we need the money over here." But it was, it was this great faith that if you just put up the money, magic was going

Emde: Throw money at it.

Conger: Throw money at it magic was going to happen. So I think in away, and we did this in mental health too, as well as physical and biological science. I think we welcomed all the cornucopia as you said, and I think in a way I think we let ourselves get cornered into over promising.

Emde: Well the huge overhead structure related to grants, which we're now suffering from a restriction of.

Conger: So anyway, but getting back to how you survive, it is, don't confuse yourself with the job and you're in the wrong job if you think that you can tidy it up every night and clean the desk, go home and start it fresh the next day, because you have to have a high tolerance for ambiguity. If you can't have a lot of tolerance, you're going to be in trouble.

Emde: And the sense of irony and humor?

Conger: And the third thing I think you have to have, and probably most important, and probably the simplest diagnosis for mental health, is a sense of humor. So if you don't take yourself and the world around you too seriously, you are likely to survive. I think another thing I've observed is there's a real temptation, especially if you're somewhat gregarious and also when you have all this responsibility, there is a real temptation -- which people are eager to foster -- of developing little kitchen cabinets, the "In" group. I've seen it time and again, where a Dean or Vice-President, or a President or a Chancellor, has this little group that are his or her kitchen cabinet, and that's in a way very helpful. You have people to talk to and there are times when it's "lonely at the top". I think it's a real trap, because you're not just saying this person is my friend and I can profit from kind of sharing things with him. But the thing I really tried very scrupulously to do, and sometimes it made it easier and sometimes it made it harder, but I really honestly don't think I established a closer relationship with any chair or department, because, as you said, this kind of somewhat medieval structure of department chairmen played a major kind of role. I didn't develop a closer relationship with any department chairman then I did with any other department chair, even though Herb Gaskill and I were personal friends. In that capacity, department chair and dean, we had the same kind of interaction. Some people didn't particularly like this; they liked to come in and say, "I was just in the Dean's office and I really straightened him out. Of course, I can go in there any time and straighten him out." Yeah, right. So at any rate, if you're going to try to get in the middle of these fiefdoms, as you said, in the battle, how power is derived -- people like David Riesman have written about this. Part of the power structure of the university -- in spades the medical school but in the university generally -- has to do with who controls the goodies, and in the old days, when the president of the university controlled all the goodies and that was it, it was quite simple to figure out how to play these power games. And particularly in a medical school, the departments have to do a lot of standing and falling on their own, and the resources that they have and the reputations that they have, are national and they're interchangeable in relations with the Government. But it is much more complicated. What I discovered is that while you had to maintain this equal treatment of absolutely everybody to maintain your credibility, whereas in the job of a department chair, it was perfectly legitimate to do it, seek their own ends, because they're not the Dean or the Chancellor, or what not. Their job is to do the best that they can for the development and the advancement of their

department, and that's just as much a major obligation for them as trying to see that the whole School advances as an institution. But if you're the Dean, you're the one person, or the Chancellor and both of them together, you're the only people who can say, look we're the people that have the responsibility for the whole place working well and having a proper relationship between departments -- and not the need to strengthen this department and build it up at the expense of a department that is not functioning very effectively. But these kinds of decisions are not going to be popular and you'd better be perceived as not playing favorites and not having a kitchen cabinet. And I think that I was able to get a number of major changes accomplished. Like we'd been trying to change the curriculum for seven years before I came in there and one of the reasons it didn't happen was that we had the department chairmen having lunch with the dean once a month at the Denver Country Club and talking about, we must do something about changing the curriculum. What I thought is, that you better get the people that are close to the students -- and, of course, you have to involve department chairs because otherwise you're not going to be successful, but "randomly" pick department chairs that are the most interested in being flexible. "Randomly" pick people who were directly teaching students, who were most impatient about getting some change, and it will happen. And with the aid of Jack Githens and a couple of other people, including Bill Frissel (associate deans) and guess what? We suddenly went from no electives to about 100 electives. And all successes are limited, but we did get a much better coordination of basic science teaching and a better integration of clinical and basic sciences -- considering somebody said changing a medical school curriculum poses all the problems of moving a graveyard. Regardless of how long the curriculum change lasted, it gave everybody a sense of renewal. So that's another reason you better have a life of your own outside of your job.

Emde: That noise in the background is a response to John mentioning the change of the medical school.

Conger: That's the siren of the fire department across the street.

Emde: Also John, before we wind up this chapter, I know that your attentiveness of problem solving, and success I might add as Dean was not limited to internal affairs but you did quite a bit for the town/?own relationships and attentiveness in that. I don't know if you would care to mention that but I seem to remember, I don't think my memory is wrong, when you finished your tenure and retired as Dean and perhaps Dean and Vice-President I'm not sure at which juncture it was, you got an award from, was it the Denver County Medical Society?

Conger: Colorado.

Emde: Colorado, the State Medical Society, a special note of merit and appreciation and that they hadn't done that before with any of the Deans who were all MD's and so the first time they gave that award was to a non MD, Ph.D. Dean. Which is really quite something.

Conger: Yes that was kind of nice.

Emde: So that was representative of high regard and a feeling of mastery of problems that you provided the leadership during your years.

Conger: Well I think one thing, I mean some of the problems were easier for me than for my predecessors because this kind of transformation to full time was more along the way, it happening more nationally, so it made it easier and less personal. But one of the things that I also told when I got this psychology management award down there in Florida, is that a lot of the things in management are not very complex and you don't have to get a degree in management to appreciate them, and one of them is that everybody that's working in an institution wants to be perceived as important, wants people to know that they exist and that what they're doing is important and to hear about it, and not just be treated as part of the furniture, or they're there simply because this has to be done. I think that frequently tends to be forgotten. I said, why is it hard to remember that, when you know it's very true of you yourself. You know you want to have people know who you are and what kind of job you are doing, and that you're being appreciated and that you're important. How come it's so easy to forget that that applies to everybody, including the lady that's handling the washing machine in the laundry. They want to know that what they are doing is important, that they are advancing the cause of the health of the citizens of Colorado and that you know that what they're doing is important. I think that one of the things, in terms of relationship between Ken Sawyer and Bob Glaser was simply recognizing what was a legitimate interest in "their" medical school. An idea that a lot of faculty

people had was, they are going to take over the place if you don't stand up for it's independence. I found out by calling up the AMA trustee or the president of the medical society and saying, look I know you're busy, but I think it's important that you know what we're thinking about and the kinds of things that I'm trying to accomplish, so if it's all right with you, I'd like to keep you informed and ultimately to get any advice you would like to give me of things I should be thinking about. You know I never got pressured. Nobody came around and said, well I got your thing and you should do this. But like everybody else, like all of the faculty they want to be recognized that they have a legitimate stake and that you think that it's important that they be kept current about what's going on in the place. Or if the President of AMA came out, as happened one time, and the local AMA trustee and a definite member of the power structure in those days, the most important member of the power structure in those days, would call up and say you know Joe so-and-so, President of the AMA, is coming out for lunch and I told him about our working relationship, and so I think the three of us should have lunch at the Cherry Hills Country Club. And what he wanted was to tell the President of the AMA was, that, look, the Dean thinks that the role we have to play is important, and what we think is important. This works with everybody from children to people on your ship. I was on two ships in the Navy, on one of which I had a captain who was a Naval reserve officer who was an autocrat, who made it perfectly clear in his opinion that he could do anything on the ship better than anybody else, from the junior apprentice seaman to the engineering officer, to anybody. The worse part of it was that he was undoubtedly right. He was the most competent person I probably ever met, and if you're going to get shot at in the middle of the Pacific he's probably a good person to have. But he promoted absolutely no loyalty because he made it perfectly clear that the only reason he couldn't do it all by himself was because he couldn't clone himself 200 times. On the other hand a subsequent skipper that I had before I became skipper myself, was an old time "mustang" former enlisted man, who had a temporary rank of commander, who had been sunk twice in the Pacific when he came to be skipper of a ship and he wasn't quite sure of these modern gadgets like radar and things like that. I'd be on the bridge at 2:00 in the morning, he'd come up and say "Conger you got the radar on?" And I'd say, "Yes, sir," a pitch black night out there. And he said, "Do you have it on relative or true?" You know relative is to the right or left of the ship's bow; true is the compass reading and I said, "It's on true sir." "Oh, Jesus Christ." he told the young look out. "Keep a sharp look out. We've got the radar on true." But this was a guy who said, you're my crew, I'm depending upon you, we're going to make it as a team or we're not going to make it. And while he was not nearly as brilliant and competent as this other man, we would have gone to hell and back with this guy because he said, you're important. This isn't a game you can play, you can't say, oh the smart thing to do is to go around and tell the person in the laundry, to tell them we realize that you're very important and we're going to have this ceremony. You know, you have to mean it. People can tell instantly whether you mean it and it's not hard to mean it, because if you think it through it is true. Everybody is important. I don't know how... I mean that relates to the kind of institution I'm familiar with and I'm familiar with being an administrator in. It may be naive to think that this could apply to modern downsizing corporations where everybody is dispensable and everybody gets taken over by this other corporation. I don't know. But at some point those basic human values... and another thing I think -- probably my last thing about administration -- is if you've got really Machiavellian and there are some very skillful Machiavellian characters to deal with. The worst thing you can do is to out Machiavelli them, but to just be absolutely simple up front and straightforward, and say this is how it is, is the only way in which you're going to be able to deal with people who are out to outsmart you. So these are all very simple things, but the thing is they work and they work because human beings are the way they are.

Emde: I'm glad we covered this ground because I've had these conversations with you before and have treasured the pieces of wisdom in there. It also strikes me as I hear you know, as you did mention casually, that there are a lot of developmental principles here. The principles of healthy development that are involved in this. The acknowledgment of a particular individual that's recognizing the particularities in individuality and importance of that individual. And the affirmation and confirmation, we could go on with the list, but these are fundamental values that you are bringing from your developmental perspective as well.

Conger: And you know something that's on everybody's tongue these days, and in Denver we have a major crisis, youth violence and what not. You can say, how do you control violence, but ultimately you fail to look at circumstances that tend to breed this indifference to human life and their impulsiveness. Again if you provide nothing, and if a kid has had no trusting relations no relationships with adults that they can trust that were dependable, that were consistent, where they have very little control over their own fate or what happens to them, they have very little opportunity to develop any sense of self esteem. The cliché is, which Freud and everybody else has said and it's still true, if you don't like or love yourself you can't really love other people, and if you don't see yourself as a worthwhile human being, it's very difficult to see anybody else in the world as having value. So again,

this kind of recognition, opportunity, the sense of you are -- as Jessie Jackson says "You are somebody." But I think they are developmental principles and they work in the complex institutions like universities the same way they do in influencing how our kids are going to grow up in the society -- or fail to grow up.

Emde: Well this is a good place to stop and we'll pick up next time, maybe we will next meet after an interlude and maybe we could talk about SRCD a bit at that point and then we could pick up other themes as we might see fit.

Here we are continuing with the John Janeway Conger interview for SRCD. This is now December 13th, 1993, as we're continuing. John you had mentioned that you had a few additional thoughts that you would like to start out with before we move into your experiences with SRCD.

Conger: Yes I would, just for a couple of minutes, Bob. I started thinking after our last interview about some of the things that I'd said about my own adolescence, which is not fascinating, except as it is reflected in my career, and also about a couple other questions that you raised in our last meeting. As I think about it, I think that I gave you a somewhat one-sided and misleading picture. On the one hand, I think it's true that as a young adolescent and away from home for the first time, I was self-conscious, shy with girls and more confused than anything by the school doctor's dire warnings about sex that I mentioned the last time. And certainly concerned with being accepted by other boys at school. I had really grown up only with about five other boys and suddenly to be in a huge school and a huge number of boys, was a very different experience for me. I think I dealt with this partly by trying in some ways to be one of the gang through athletics. I know I worked very hard to be playing manager of the soccer team. The manager part was because I wasn't a very good soccer player. And diving and swimming, which I was good at. And as I said earlier, by developing a self-protective and nobody-can-put-me-down kind of armor, and that's where the Noel Coward attempts at sophistication came in. I was thinking after we talked, I even wrote highly derivative songs like; "I don't like to talk, Mrs. Astor, but...", which I'm sure had something to do with Coward's, "Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs. Worthington." While my prep school classmates strove to be on the honors or disciplinary councilor leaders in student government, I was definitely the class skeptic. I wrote a weekly column for the Ashnoca, which was our school paper and was really a very good school paper -- people from there went on to become editors of the Yale Daily News, the Daily Princetonian, the Harvard Crimson, and it was a very good paper. But I wrote a column called "Through The Keyhole," which occasionally gave the Headmaster fits, as when I gave sardonic annual awards, like 10 awards each year. Like, for example, I gave one to the DAR for having the good sense to prevent Marion Anderson from singing in Constitution Hall. Apparently a sizable number of the School's mothers were Daughters of the American Revolution, as the Headmaster soon found out. I remember I also gave an award to a prominent US Ambassador, I won't say to what country, for almost getting away with a hit and run driving episode. These kind of things the Headmaster kept saying to me, couldn't you just kind of tone it down a bit, and I was saying, well sir, you said in your sermons on Sunday in chapel that we had the duty to fearlessly call the things the way we saw them and act with courage. Of course, the only courage I was showing was as a rather impertinent adolescent, I was taking strong stands for which I didn't pay the price but for which he did. It took a few years for that to sink in from my adolescent arrogance.

Emde: You got it from the other side.

Conger: Yeah right. Later I got it in spades, as an administrator. From the other side of the fence it looks a lot different. But at the same time there was a private part of me it seemed more idiosyncratic than it undoubtedly was and I clung to as an essential part of who I was. I was about age 15 at the time, that I began seriously writing and publishing poetry. I remember worrying a lot about why I should be privileged when others were starving in the Depression and men on the streets in New York selling apples, it made an indelible impression on my sister and myself. In fact, a slight divergence here, but when we were children, our parents used to take us every year to see Peter Pan, which then Eva Le Gallenne was flying to the balconies in those days. She's not flying any more. Then one year our parents announced they were going to take us to New York to see her as Peter Pan and we both of us said we didn't want to go. They finally pried out of us the reason was we couldn't stand to see the people on the streets selling apples. So we didn't go to Peter Pan that year. So we were in a sense, Depression kids. That was the time in prep school also that I became an agnostic despite a brief but intense romance with Anglo-Catholicism after reading Bernard Iddings Bell, "Beyond Agnosticism" and having a chance to meet him. I decided he was one religious figure who wasn't mentally defective. During that time, I remember, I translate~ a large part of the book of Job into blank verse, and kept looking up scholarly references about where the different parts of Job came from. So

in a way I was much more intellectual at 16 or 15 than I've been since. Those were the times when I was reading Anna Christie and Gorky's *The Lower Depths* and Maughm's *Of Human Bondage*. The School made a nice little secluded Music House off in the woods, which nobody seemed to frequent very much, except me. I could go out there and read, or under my blanket with a flashlight after lights out. Anyway, all pretty heavy stuff for a 30's teenager. I imagine if Sylvia Platt had been around at that time, I probably would have devoured *Ariel* as well. I guess what I learned from my happy-go-lucky football playing fraternity brothers at Amherst that I mentioned last time, was that I could afford to lighten up and be more easy going while still retaining serious concerns about all these adolescent concerns about the meaning of life and who I was and my concerns for the state of the world. In fact I discovered that they actually, to my surprise, thought it was kind of neat if odd that I wrote poetry. I ended up my senior year as class poet, following in the unfillable footsteps of Dick Wilbur who had been the class poet the year before and of course became America's Poet Laureate. And very importantly I also found out about that time that I didn't have to be shy with girls. I feel that this is where, I think it's relevant, it seems an awful divergence to me for this SRCD thing. But I think it is relevant in the sense that I feel sure that, at least to some extent, the increasing emphasis in my career over the years on the needs of children, adolescents, and families, has roots both in my youthful concerns about the arbitrary and often unfair ways society treated people and in my own good fortune with having loving parents, even when I disagreed with them and the ups and downs of my own adolescent struggles and introspections and their resolution with "a little help from my friends". That just brings me briefly to one other thing that I wanted to add from our discussion last time -- add to my sort of haphazard answers to your questions about my research interests and activities. During the last 15 or 20 years I have found my interests focusing increasingly on child, adolescent, and family policy issues, as you well know, and on the effects of social change over time. This is certainly reflected both in my scholarly writings and professional and political involvement. Federal, state or local, or whatever. In fact, if there is one predominant thread running through my career, it probably is a concern for the future of children and youth. And also with families in an era of headlong social change. I know, starting with my article in the *Deadus* issue on early adolescence, dealt really with social change and the family as it affected youth, in that these have been concern in much of my writing, as well as in a lot of the testimony I've done before Congress and various professional groups such as the Academy of Pediatrics, or in films and the Children's TV Playhouse -- the special they did on adolescence. The focus of my Presidency of the American Psychological Association and my Presidential Address were largely concerned with issues of children, adolescence and youth and lots of the testimony that I tried to give at that time all were centered around these kinds of issues. My own principle contribution on the President's Commission on Mental Health, which was really one of the more fascinating years that I spent, and during which I must say I developed an enormous admiration for Mrs. Carter, I think my own principle contribution there was helping to ensure that in the final report, the health and the mental health needs of children in adolescence did not get overlooked and, in fact, were very strongly recognized and that appropriate actions to implement some of the things that needed to be done, were recommended. Finally I've got to admit to having some frustrating times particularly when President Reagan and I both became Presidents at the same time.

Emde: Was that through a joint constituency?

Conger: I think it was a very vocal lack of a constituency. I probably should have know that there was a warning signal when I was informed that I couldn't get into the presidential suite at the Mayflower because it had been taken over by the Reaganites who had descended on the town in block long limousines. And as one of the women at the United Airlines Office at the Red Carpet room at Dullas told me, she said, "In this job you get to see a lot of women in long fur coats, but only this week have I seen them arriving in full length minks carrying Russian Sables in the other arm." So I found I couldn't get into my presidential suite as APA President for about two weeks because of the Reaganites descending on us. This probably should have been kind of a warning sign because within weeks of taking office he got Congress to reverse itself on the Mental Health Systems Act, which had only recently been enacted by overwhelming majorities in both Houses and had gained a pledge from fiscally conservative if socially liberal President Carter to initiate it with 500 million dollars. So that it was overwhelmingly rejected (after having I recently been overwhelmingly approved) within weeks after President Reagan took r office. This was the Act that was to implement the recommendations of the Commissions Report, with some necessary political adjustments. Also about the same time Lee Schorr delivered this magnificent -- I've got a copy of it right here -- this "Better Health For Our Children, A National Strategy", so about that time she, delivered this, in my opinion, magnificent congressionally mandated three volume report on the health needs of America's children, and it too fell largely on deaf ears. I remember also when several young women, bright eager and enthusiastic, Nancy Russo and some others from the central office of the AP A, went across the street from the AP A to the offices of the Reagan Presidential Transition Team, which symbolically or not, actually happened to be located above Yummy Yogurt was across the

street from AP A, to talk with the Transition Team about the needs of children, women and families. They were abruptly informed not only that the new Administration was not interested in things to do with research on women and families, but in fact that all attempts to do social research, as it was called, quote "social" were viewed as an attack on the family as defined I guess by Reagan and friends. So I just wanted to add those two things to what I talked about earlier. A lot of it being that my interests have shifted and increasingly, more and more my activities have been involved with issues involving children adolescents and families. So thank you for the opportunity to sort of have second thoughts about some of the things we talked about last time.

Emde: Well thank you John, that was a very poignant and I think articulate statement. I'm glad for those second thoughts for our record. It seems to me it points out in a very central way how one phase of your life really has been key in some ways. You give us a very clear picture I think of the struggles with values, feelings, different sensitivities in yourself and identities in adolescence which have been a continuing influence, preoccupation and point of empathy for you with children families and social policy as you've just portrayed it. I think it gives us a nice insight on an essential period in your life, that you've continued to think about and contribute to both in your scholarly work, your research and public policy. I'm also reminded of the, sort of a concept that some of the people have put forth a number of years ago, it was a book on mid-life, in which they talked about the uses of the past. That one actively revisits and reuses continually throughout the life span, certain key times in the past and it does fit in also with some of Glenn Elder's work on cohorts. The importance of particular times, as you portrayed again the Depression. Because you were preoccupied with the difference between Peter Pan ideals and selling apples on the street. And in fact you have continued in your poems, which I want to get to later, it seems to me to be almost entranced at times, with spaces in between different features of life. That sometimes can't be integrated so easily, sensitivities that need to be felt sometimes that aren't necessarily and that appear in your poetic images. I think to shift gears slightly but actually picking up from some of your public policy activities and statements at the end of your second thoughts, what we have remaining to do in the oral history interview, is to talk a bit about your experiences with SRCD. The oral history committee and the organization are quite interested in documenting rather specifically the experiences with SRCD, of leaders in our field. So maybe just very concretely, when was it that you joined the society and what were your earliest contacts? Do you remember the first meeting for example, that you attended?

Conger: I remember the first meeting, but I'm not exactly certain when it was. Well I can recall the first meeting and I don't have a date, but it had to have been probably in the early 70's I think that I became actively involved. Let me put it this way, the first meeting I went to was still on a college campus and we were rejoicing in the fact that because we were small everybody could go to everything. There were like 500 members or something like that. So unlike AP A, which had already begun to grow large and in some peoples views impersonal, why here was an unfettered opportunity to interact with people whose real interest was child development, not only in psychology but across disciplines as much as we could make it that way, to get together and interact and everybody could participate in everything. I remember people more or less making pious statements about, well it's certainly fortunate that we don't have more than 500 or 600 hundred people involved, because if it was any larger why the organization would lose it's identity and become just another convention. And of course it is now much much bigger and while there are certainly some problems, bigger is never in all respects better, there is some losses in the relationships that we all had in those days. But on the other hand, there are the benefits reflected in the field's growing up and the enormous areas of research that weren't even envisaged in those early days. It was pretty possible to say, well, here's where things are in child development in those days. To kind of get a summary of it with say 500

Emde: Just John if I could interject.

Conger: You are probably a much better historian here then I am.

Emde: I do have some reference points, I think it was the meeting in 1965 that may have been the last one on a college campus. I think that was at Berkeley. I wonder if you came to that. It was also the dedication of the Harold Jones Center at Berkeley, were you at that meeting?

Conger: No I wasn't at that meeting. It seems to me it would have been mid 60's when you joined then. There was an earlier one, was it at the University of Pennsylvania?

Emde: Yeah, that's where it was. Maybe it was Penn State, did they have one at Penn State?

Conger: I don't know it was before I joined. Well obviously it was much earlier than I was thinking it was. It was while it was still on the campus and I remember that feeling of intimacy and fellowship. Child development had one editor who read all the papers. But aside from just going and interacting with people my formal involvement first was in 1977 on the Publications Committee. I don't think that I applied any strong influence there. I mean we wrestled with issues about how many pages we could afford to have, and how much we could put into the various publications. We worried about editorships and having people's views properly reflected. We worried about costs and how to keep them down while still expanding publication with the field growing so rapidly. I don't recall having played any sort of central role in this. We did recognize the need for expanding and I do know that we struggled with the issue of trying to keep costs down for the not very rich group of constituents. But I think it was really when I somehow, I'm sure it was only because it was in Denver, but I was asked to be chair of the Program Committee. That was only a handful of people, maybe six or at the most eight people who were the Program Committee. We were told to expect that we would get something like 300 submissions, including both papers and symposia. It was a little higher than that by the time of the supposed final date for mailing in your proposal. But it was a little higher, which made us a little nervous, but then what really provoked a mild crisis atmosphere, was that for like the next two weeks after the deadline, papers just kept flocking in, and it was this amazing phenomenon. We didn't get many stamped letters that came in late, but we got an awful lot of ones where the postage meter showed that they had been stamped in time but somehow they got lost in the mail for a couple of weeks getting to us. We suddenly ended up with, I forget the numbers now, but it was something like 800 submissions. I think that the committee met formally for a couple of times and then from then on they couldn't keep continuously meeting and what really happened was that fortunately I was granted a lot of freedom by the University to kind of do things in my own way, and with Dorothy Townsend my secretary, assistant, colleague, friend etc. who had been with me all those years as Dean, Vice-President and everything back to Professor, if we hadn't been able to just spend two months doing absolutely nothing else I think we would have had a real problem. Dorothy Eichorn flew in and spent additional time as did Fran Horowitz. These were the days when we were struggling with clumping papers together and having sections that had a coherent title. I remember Fran Horowitz was absolutely incredibly ingenious at finding a title that would commonly describe four of what other people would view as widely desperate papers to make it "a" topic. As a result of this somewhat traumatic experience we recommended to Council that really in the future this couldn't go on in this fashion and there needed to be a real reorganization. One thing we said was you really did have to be serious about what the deadline was, and we couldn't have this late deluge. You could tell better than I how it has turned out, but I think one way we proposed was that papers had to be there by a certain time, not theoretically mailed. The other thing was, we said you can't do this with just one committee of eight people and we recommended that there ought to be subcommittees or panels on different topics which then could part of an overall program committee. I believe that that's sort of the way it's currently being done. So it's a vast improvement. But that was a pretty horrendous time for a while there.

Emde: You still had at that time, we should go back and look up and insert the year there, but what percentage do you remember, John, of the program roughly or proportion were orally delivered papers, because that's really changed throughout the years.

Conger: There was really very little in the way of posters. A lot of individuals were maybe, I'm just guessing wildly, but there were maybe two-thirds individual papers and about one-third symposia and I don't even recall any poster sessions.

Emde: No I think that came later.

Conger: Right.

Emde: But that's really changed in terms of the program. We had a few individual papers at the last meeting after having dropped them and the feedback was quite negative, about the individual papers. So we will I'm sure in the future, not have individual delivered papers. A variety of other formats, master lectures, and symposia, and things of that sort, but not individual submitted papers in sessions. Things are too diverse and communications taking other forms.

Conger: That's a very logical evolution. Everything was so much smaller and so many people were involved with sort of everything going on that it was much easier in those days.

Emde: But I also remember, leading up to that John, to that meeting there was a tad of a crisis. I wondered if you I d care to comment on that.

Conger: I was supposed to be the Program Committee and I got roped in for that, and Kay Tennes got roped in for Local Arrangements, and there was nothing like hiring Candy Wong from AP A to run it. What happened was, arrangements were made with -- this is the best of my recollection at any rate -- arrangements were made with the Hilton to hold the conference, have all the rooms available for meetings, and provide room space for all the exhibitors. And we were beginning to have a fair number of exhibitors at that point, which brought in some dough, and Kay came to see me and said, "I've got this problem and I don't know what to do about it." And I said, "What's that?" And she said, "Well, the Hilton, they called me and the convention manager down there said that we've got a problem, and I said, what's our problem?" And he said, well, unfortunately that they had scheduled the Music Teachers of America to not end until about a day after our meeting was supposed to begin. And I said to Kay, "Well, what do you mean we've got a problem?" I said, "They've got a problem!" So we went down to meet with the convention manager, and subsequently, I think, the manager of the hotel, and they said, well, we're terribly sorry about this problem that ~ have, and I said, "Let's get off on the right foot, we don't have a problem, you have a problem, what we're interested in is how you're going to solve your problem." And they said, "Well, there really is nothing we can do at this point because people who are in have priority over..." And I said, "Well I don't mean to be difficult, but this is totally unsatisfactory and you've got to come up with a solution, and I just think it would really look terrible for you, I mean you are a national chain, and I know, as President of the American Psychological Association and having had a lot of interactions with the American Psychiatric Association and. the American Pediatric Association, none of them would be happy to learn that they couldn't depend upon the Hilton for reliable behavior." At that point they decided, I think that they had a problem more then we had a problem. Eventually it got resolved by saying, well we can't throw them out of the meeting rooms and we can't have the exhibition space until the other people leave, so they ended up hiring, at a considerable expense to the Hilton, space in the Convention Center for meetings and for the exhibitors, and providing free transportation back and forth from the hotel to the Convention Center on a regular basis. I remember also saying, I know the exhibitors are going to be terribly upset about this discombobulation of theirs, so I'm sure you wouldn't want to charge any fees to the exhibitors, in view of what you're putting them through, and I'm sure that with having to go back and forth to the Convention Center exhibit and then moving it over here, that you want to make everybody feel happy by providing coffee and donuts during this, and I guess you're just going to have to find rooms in other hotels at your expense for the people that can't get in their rooms. It eventually worked, out but it was pretty hectic. Do you have a recollection of that meeting? Is that approximately what happened?

Emde: I remember too, your account, John, I think illustrates very nicely, as you recall this off the cuff, your style of negotiation and administration wherein you could use a combination of humor and suspended judgment to achieve goals. I remember there was a long period in there, it seemed to be long maybe it was a week or two, before this was resolved and you were using a lot of maneuvering and haggling, and I'm sure it caused a lot of ennui and discomfort to you because it was a tense time there for awhile. It was not an easy thing that came about, but due to your skillful pressuring and negotiation, where you were in effect participating in their options and alternatives and you didn't just slam the door on them.

Conger: I remember they offered to move us to Dallas for free and I said that that wasn't going to work. They were going to move the whole thing for free to Dallas.

Emde: People still talk about the Denver meeting of SRCD because it had such a nice tone, after all that happened, and of course they weren't aware of that.

Conger: And we did have an elegant cocktail party at the Denver Art Museum.

Emde: At the Denver Art Museum, which everybody loves.

Conger: Which I take no credit whatever for, that was Kay and her group, but it was very elegant.

Emde: John then you I know more recently played a very strong and stabilizing role on the SRCD finance committee and I wondered if you had any perspectives on that, because that's really quite recent, I think the last year or two you finished.

Conger: Yes I ended a year ago, and I'm trying to remember when I started.

Emde: You may have had a couple of terms on that, it seems to me.

Conger: Yes I think I either had two terms, or I completed a term and had a term. But somehow I was involved for about four or five years, I remember that. I think that aside from the length of time, well there were large number of issues that we dealt with, but I think the one I felt most strongly, almost from the beginning and was trying to urge on my colleagues with a strong assist from a couple of other members, was the need as times were changing and as the organization was getting bigger and the amount of money that we were dealing with as an organization was increasing, was the need to -- and especially with rapid changes in things like interest rates -- was the need to get away from simply relying on rotating CD's and making sure that there were some CD's that would come due whenever we needed money. Which was sort of the way it was at the time that I came in. I think there had been some more imaginative activity a few years before when the inimitable Dottie Eichorn was involved (by one story our "Pan American" professor of psychology, in that she spent a large portion of her life on Pan American airplanes) and had us investing, I believe, in a race horse. She was quite skillful about the finances, but at any rate by then, this was very much the pattern, and so I said I thought it would be very ultimately self-defeating in the long run. We couldn't put the funds of SRCD in jeopardy so we had to have a very reliable funds that we could always count on being there for a majority of the funds, but we were going to actually end up losing money in terms of deflated dollars, if we couldn't expand beyond that. What I thought we ought to do was starting with a very modest basis, to use dollar averaging where you're buying more stuff when stocks or bonds were down and less when they were high, and you'd never know which was which, except that over time it worked out. We let SRCD gradually, you know, take a certain portion of the funds and begin dollar averaging into very well managed, by super money managers, funds. So we took a while to get into that, I think principally because of all the readjustments and changes and setting up new offices and everything, concentrating on these issues was not the top priority. I thought we were actually investing about a year before we began to be investing. Which would have been nice because the particular funds we were going to invest in that year, happened to be the year they went up 89%. At any rate, you know better about this now than I, because I've been off it for a year, but we are now investing on a regular basis, and over time it certainly will help to protect from just losing funds due to ,the inroads. Now in the last couple of years what has happened to short term interest rates becomes nonsensical. You don't even have to wait for the future to lose money. Fortunately, we are a tax-exempt organization otherwise you could be losing money immediately just in terms of taxes plus interest at an extremely low rate. I think that having an investment policy, and I think that I have some concerns which I've expressed freely, about the new policy of having a money manager for three percent a year, who will then disperse money to various money managers for their funds, because 3% a year -- this is the new way -- it's a pretty high amount off the top before you begin to get any returns on the dollar. On the other hand, the central office and the administration of SRCD has about a billion things on their minds and John's mind. So I think they've got a very sound reliable person. I guess a couple of us would have preferred making more direct investments, but as I look on it I think that having somebody that, I had a very good experience with this guy when he was managing things like their investments in CD's and so forth. It's probably a good idea, but it's not the least expensive way to have an investment policy.

Emde: He did make a presentation to governing council.

Conger: He knows my concerns.

Emde: Also I think there's another principle that the organization certed, I think it was during your tenureship on the Finance Committee, that is firmly in place, namely, that we do have a full year's, in fact we have more then a full year's expenses of the Organization, including the journal's expenses in escrow. In other words we maintain that amount which is the invested amount you were concerned about protecting.

Conger: Right. We felt strongly that that should be, and that that was probably enough. It was a lot of fun.

Emde: We really appreciate your stable guidance in that, because I know you have a long standing set of skills and experience in finance. There's a question here too that the committee is interested in. What do you believe are the most important changes to occur in SRCD and it's activities during your association, at the time of your association?

Conger: Goodness!

Emde: You've mentioned of course the size.

Conger: I think, it doesn't sound like a dramatic statement, but I think the flexibility that SRCD has shown in being able to keep up with an enormously rapidly expanding field, and finding ways to do this while still holding people together as people who, regardless of their diversity in other respects, have firm commitment to child development. So I think that's a major accomplishment, and some of the ways that you've been able to do it are: one, through the kind of journal policies that you've had; through making adjustments from the kind of meetings that we used to have when we were this small group, to find ways of staying on top of things. By having things like poster sections, by having meetings that attempt to pick an area and then synthesize it and have presentations about that. That synthesizing function I think is a very valuable one. I think that regardless of the electronic highway, I think the Abstracts are invaluable, and I'm not concerned about the duplication with AP A Psych Abstracts, or whatnot. I found, and as a person who writes a lot of books, I've found the Child Development Abstracts to be very valuable. I think the variety that's been shown in the monographs and the generally high quality are all great tributes to an organization that didn't let itself get overwhelmed by growth or change. And it still has, for all it's numbers, it still has a kind of feeling of intimacy. You feel like, and even when there's thousands of graduate students and you don't know who they are or where they're from, it still has a kind of a feeling of fellowship and intimacy. People there sort of have something in common which is children. I think the efforts to become more interdisciplinary, which I think have been very sincere and determined, and you can certainly comment, may not always have been as imaginative as they could have been, but there was a real dedication not to become a society of child psychologists or developmental psychologists, calling itself a Society for Research in Child Development. I think we really profited and grown from getting more inter-disciplinary involvement and trying to rotate the influential offices and again make people aware of development across disciplines. I think that's a real plus. I think it would be great if we can continue to find ways to get greater involvement from people who are doing research related to child development in these other disciplines. From pediatrics, anthropology, whatever. But it's going to take working at it because a lot of people who would get a lot from it, don't realize that they would. But you could comment on that far better than I, because you're Mr. Interdisciplinary, as far as I can make out.

Emde: Your comments bring to mind that, I'll turn it around as a question, do you think people who go into child development as a field tend to be more affiliative and more generative? If so, does that put it a special challenge considering what you just said, to bring in different points of view and to keep it multidisciplinary and multi prospectivistic.

Conger: Right. I do think that, I guess it's one of the main reason I feel like I'm among friends, because there's enormous individual diversity. When I think of my friends in SRCD, in a lot of respects they couldn't be more unlike each other. But I think there is this affiliative, generative orientation and it's reflected in concerns for children, that's another thing that I think is a plus in recent years is a much greater involvement with social policy issues and the effects of national policies on the well being of children and adolescence and by implication families. I think that's a very healthy development and it shows that you can bring analytical, hard-headed thinking to these so called -- from some quarters -- bleeding-heart issues, you know, what about the future of the nation's children. So I think the getting more involved in social policy and in a responsible kind of activism is another plus. But I think that, to come to the other point that you made, that affiliative and generative thing, as an ex-medical school Dean, I see that, say, within pediatrics, where you've also got a great variety. You find people in pediatrics whose interests are primarily in and probably don't extend a great deal beyond, say molecular biology, but you find certainly much larger percentages of people in pediatrics who share this kind of affiliative and generative concern, then you do, say, in cardiovascular surgery or so forth. And certainly the same thing in child psychiatry. Like this tug of war that I went on over the years, that I was sort of an observer of, between "general" psychiatry and child psychiatry. I think a lot of it had to do with these kinds of issues which got much more attention in child psychiatry, and there was much more of an interdisciplinary orientation in child psychiatry than there was in general psychiatry. And the roots of

the child guidance movement and clinics. All of this and their interdisciplinary aspects, I think all of these make for a natural kind of marriage.

Emde: Do you think there's something about the topic of children, children are open, and as we make use of that past in us and our interests in children around us, we have to be more multidisciplinary, perhaps as we identify with the openness.

Conger: I think that's absolutely right. But the one thing, children are what all these different professions are looking at and also I think that it's sort of like the point I was making, I think last time briefly, but people can be very good in a lot of other respects, in either research contributions or in dealing clinically, or dealing with social policy, or dealing with other age groups and so forth, but I think that in disciplines you have to be able to work with children and, I think also, to be able think intelligently about the issues confronting children and adolescents. I think it takes a kind of openness, and certainly less pomposity, than you might find in other parts of medicine or psychology or any of the other related professions. I think that was one of the things I mentioned last time about working with adolescents and the observation I made when I was trying to coordinate adolescent services in the Department, and I was spending a lot of time on the adolescent inpatient service and looking at second year residents coming on. You could tell pretty well in a couple of weeks whether they could work with adolescents. One of the challenges children present, in addition to the openness, there's all this battle for independence which too many clinicians ignore the fact that adolescent patients are still adolescents and still no matter what problems they have, are still confronted with achieving independence and separateness and all that. And to watch, within a couple weeks, whether adolescents were the cup of tea of a particular resident. They might have been great for adults, where you can still get away with "Whoever wants the answer must come to me." One of the things was being open, not being terrifically defensive, because kids can spot your Achilles heel, with deadly accuracy. Also not needing, which I think is another important thing, not needing have constant expressions of eternal gratitude for the services that you've kindly provided.

Emde: Because you won't get it.

Conger: Because even the kid who is profiting the most, out of their pride and need for independence, is going to have to deny that you are really having too much influence on him. The other thing I think, which I suppose is a side observation, but one of the important things in dealing with the children and particularly in dealing with adolescents because it's a more ambiguous area and it has something to do with resolving your own adolescent dilemmas, is a need to be able to set limits in a comfortable fashion. And not an over-determined thing, like who's in charge here, or this or that, but you're recognizing that kids, especially kids that are really struggling to hang on, and have serious problems, that they need to know that there are limits, and if necessary-you will set them. And it won't be an over-determined set of reasons why you're doing it, because it genuinely is in the interest of the kid. Another prescription for disaster is the therapist who can't say no, like the parent who kind of needs to be one of the kids, which I guess has something to do with an unresolved adolescence of your own, and for that reason has trouble in setting limits. This can be perceived, one, as very threatening by the kid; and secondly, it's a pretty good evidence to the kid at some level at least that you don't really understand him.

Emde: It's interesting John that you've come to this. It really adds to the dimensions of affiliation and generativity, is the importance for all of us, and maybe I think for the organization, to be concerned with this other dimension of control self-discipline and knowing ones' values and being comfortable in asserting those values. We're all being more and more concerned about that, more explicitly today. I know this is something you've been concerned about throughout your career and we've talked about. This might be a place to conclude this part of the oral history. I would like to just take a few moments, maybe by way of a coda, to just reflect on some of your poetry John, if that's OK.

Conger: Sure.

Emde: This should be fun, John you gave me a book of your published poems called "The Shape of the Tree", which I've thoroughly enjoyed browsing through, reading and re-reading with combinations of images and meter. I thought I'd like to make a comment about it and get you to react or reflect on it. It seems to me that this delightful book of poems which is a collection of poems that you've written since your youth, I gather, in the war, the Second World War up to more recent time. It seems to me I'm reminded of some of the

lyricism and some of the visual images New England visual images of Robert Frost. I'm also reminded of some of the soul and means if you will, of John Keats, with your musings that call forth goddess of poetry, speak to Poesey with your interests in space between things, between different aspects of expressiveness and being, I think as you put it in one place. Finding spaces that are in between aspects of living and our sensibilities. Also with your images that capture various kinds of dynamic features of life, into some kind of suspended place. As like in the Ode To Grecian Urn. Then I'm struck with the fact that many of your poems in the New England imagery give as much if not more attention to the autumn and winter, perhaps even more attention than to the spring and the summer. Even poems going back to your youth are concerned with there is a certain sense of wistfulness if not sadness. The title of your book, "The Shape Of The Tree", to paraphrase it from memory, is only known when the last leaf has fallen.

Conger: Well, I think that's interesting. You give me a lot to talk about. Starting from where you left off, I think that certainly this theme of autumn is one that recurs throughout there. I guess I see, it has a lot to do with nature, but I guess what I see is nature as a metaphor for the human condition and that's where I'm kind of coming from. And you're absolutely right one of the influences on me and I had some exposure to them was. Robert Frost and people like Emily Dickinson whose house I passed everyday going to classes at Amherst College and one of the reasons I went to Amherst College was to become a poet. And David Morton was the Poet in Residence, who was a New England nature poet. I'll come back to the autumn in a minute, but people that certainly influenced me early on, like Keats -- in my youth one of the good things about going to Asheville school, aside from being somewhat confusing, was that they really had a great respect for English for poetry. And it's interesting you mentioned Keats, because the Sixth Form English prize which I received was a beautiful blue Moroccan bound leather gilt-edged gold-inscribed volume of Keats. So early on I was exposed to Keats and Shelley and Alfred Lord Tennyson. And a lot of my early poem sound painfully like Tennyson, in terms of the music of the language, if not the content. Subsequently, T.S. Eliot had a great influence on me, as you couldn't possibly be in that generation without being influenced by him and be alive. But you had to grow beyond that too, and I think that the most persistent influences that didn't get left by the wayside as I developed my own style or whatever you want to call it, were more than anybody else, Eleanor Wiley who was a poet of the twenties who was married to William Rose Benet. You mentioned images several times in your comments there, and she was an imagist I poet and just wrote the most elegant verse and with overtones of autumn in her poetry too: "When the foxes eat the last gold grape, and the last white antelope is killed," and so forth. So I think that there are these kinds of roots in my poetry, and what is interesting to me to observe in myself is that, at least not initially with Amherst or in the War but in recent, I'd say the last 30 years or so, the only time I find myself ready to write poetry is when I'm in Vermont. I just don't seem to be able to write poetry -- I guess I'm too busily entrenched in the dailyness of life -- in Colorado. And the time that I have freedom from everything is when I'm in Vermont. But more importantly, I think, Vermont is where my roots are, and I think the wellspring for your imagination, creativity, a large part of it comes from your childhood, from your adolescence, and for me those centered around Vermont. When I wasn't in school, I was in Vermont. It's almost like osmosis that it became a part of me, in trying to say things about feelings, or thoughts, or the human condition, to put it in an overblown term. Nature really is a kind of a natural metaphor for me, and not just because it's a metaphor for New England poets that I was exposed to. To give you an example of it, we're looking out this window here at the Rocky Mountains. When we first came out here -- I had started out to be a painter as well before I was going to become a poet. I'm still kind of a Sunday painter -- when I came out here and I looked at these marvelous 100 mile landscapes and the great sky and everything, I said wow, I've got to paint this because I painted Vermont from the time I was 14 on, I said this is going to be great, I can paint a whole new world out here. I had to give up immediately, however, because everything I tried to paint in Colorado looked like a false version of Vermont, I mean Vermont was just in my bones. I remember one day I was in a meeting at the Nassau Inn in Princeton where I was coping with my boredom so I found myself sort of drawing a doodle on a piece of yellow paper, just like this, and I didn't pay much attention to it, it turned out it was a picture of an elm tree and a barn and some rolling hills and meadows and after the meeting somebody came over and said, "Well that's pretty good, what are you going to do with that?" And I said, "I don't know." Then I got home and I decided, well that isn't bad, I think I'll use it for a Christmas card, how can I eliminate the lines on the yellow paper. But somebody said, "Well now what kind of tree is that?" And I said, "Well that's an elm." And they said, "How do you know what an elm looks like?" And I said, I don't know what an elm looks like." You know if you'd asked me to describe it. But the drawing proved I just knew what an elm was and I think that intimate involvement during the most formative years of my life with nature, it's reflected in the poetry. Now the business about this quite recurrent theme about autumn, there are two things that I think are relevant here, because there's been more of the theme in recent years than it was, is that the least dynamic factor involved here, is that until last year I was never free enough to get away from here to go to Vermont except in the fall. So what I physically saw

around me each year, were the glories of fall changing to the, I think I called it, "Winter's reticence" in one of the poems. So I was influenced by the time of year that I was living in, and so those were the images I was physically surrounded by and that I think played a role. In spring you are looking at more new life and everything's growing, there's opportunity for renewal. But the other thing is, on a more dynamic level, I'm approaching the autumn of ~y own life. I think that's one of the main things that all of us work in some way to resolve, is how do you relate to the autumn of your life. And I think you're absolutely right, there is in some respects, there's an element of sadness in it. But I think there are also elements of hope, because I'm really enjoying this and I don't really have any desire to, you know, for accelerate the decline and fall of John Conger.

Emde: Or take up Faust.

Conger: Right. I'm not ready to make any deals. Let's just call it quits and stop right here, I'm prepared if necessary to do that, but I think at the same time that there is this, undeniably there is this element, I think there is also an element of hope which I think is genuine, because, well the poem I wrote about Aspen

Emde: Do you want to read it John? Would you read it for us?

Conger: That one was written in Colorado. Where is it here, page 34. It's short I might as well read the whole thing:

*Twelve aspen leaves lay scattered
In careful disarray,
Across a field of velvet green,
Each perfect in it's way.
No two alike, the jeweler said,
Since each was veined by God,
It's prodigal asymmetry
In finest silver shod.*

*No less themselves than these are men,
Who blindly seek to see
And draw their lives in blood to buy
Brief immortality.*

*While golden aspen cast their leaves
To wind, and snow, and rain,
In quiet, timeless confidence
that spring will come again.*

And really the sense of renewal is much more essential to what life is about than the search for "brief immortality" which is pretty much a losing game anyway I guess unless you're Mozart or somebody. I think that a way of a more meaningful kind of immortality, if you will, comes from feeling a part of nature, and feeling a part of the elements and the changing seasons, and their being a part of you and you being a part of them. I think that that's a more genuine non self delusional kind of a way of saying because we all want some kind of immortality and this kind of identification provides something that is real and is not delusional, as opposed to the kind of false gods' immortality. So I get a lot of comfort from that. This is probably too confessional but you know I want my ashes scattered someplace that has to do with nature. I don't want to be stuck in some box or something. All it is, is some chemicals and whatnot, but nature is forever and some of the happiest moments of my life also have had to do with the experiences that I've had surrounded by nature. Certainly a lot of the happiest parts of my adolescence were not in the city, or as I said in one of those poems, Metropolis "there is no comfort here." At the same time we all can realize that nature isn't a sentimental force either, it can very beneficent, it can also be very non-hostily cold.

Emde: If I could be permitted just one other observation or commentary, it seems to me this theme does pervade your poems written over your adult lifetime, in a broader way as well. As the way you've talked about the autumn, for a metaphor of your life now. That you've talked about the importance of an autumn periodically in life and in career, if I could expand it. That one needs times of moving into silence, of simplifications, of space away from city, from academia, from the hurly burly, in order to then have the period where one can reconstitute and then that there is hope then that new things, fresh things, fresh life and

liveliness can emerge and that this has been a theme of your life too and an implicit message of your life history. Being a poet, as well as an academician, child development scientist and leader.

Conger: I think you're right.

Emde: Thank you very much John, it's been a pleasure.

Conger: Well thank you.

Emde: I hope it will be a pleasure for others to read in various seasons of the year.

Conger: I have some apprehensions about that.

End of Interview