Interview I

MARCIA: How did you get the idea, what were your aim or aims in beginning the column?

AL: In 1967, there was a strike in New York City dealing with economic issues which lasted 13 school days. Then, in 1968, there were three strikes which went from the first day of school in September to November 19th with two returns to work. Until this period of time when we had the four strikes in a little over a year, my view as a leader of the union was a fairly traditional view, I guess, and that is that I was elected by the teachers, the members of the union, and my responsibility was to keep them happy, and it did not make any difference if the newspapers liked me or parents liked me or if the public liked me or agreed with me or disagreed with me; that I represented one particular group and that's where my responsibilities were.

During these strikes, I was presented for the most part very, very negatively in the press. There was universal opposition. Of course, strikes were illegal so there was the whole question of legality. And there was just opposition to the strikes by the press in general, even though there was, in most editorials, some acknowledgment that we had some points or some justice or some merit on our side. But it wasn't just the stories or the editorials; it was even photographs. I remember a photograph that appeared on the front page of the "Week in Review" section of the Sunday *New York Times*, and I guess it was a picture of me, and I must have been standing on top of a van and making a speech to a large rally. I looked at the picture over and over again, because it was a picture taken from I guess about 15 feet below my chin straight

up. I looked at it for about an hour and I just couldn't recognize who I was, and I don't think anybody else did, either.

But at any rate, while our members came out of those strikes with great confidence both in the union and me personally and the union and I had a great deal of public support in those strikes, clearly a great deal of damage had been done. And I realized at that point that while it was not important that I be popular or well liked by these other groups, that if they came to believe that the leader of the union was some kind of a madman who was only interested in power or confrontation or who somehow had a personal need to shut the schools down and gain a great deal of pleasure and gratification from this, that this would have a tremendous impact on public education in New York City. It would affect the willingness of the public to support schools; it would certainly affect the willingness of the governor and the legislature to provide the right levels of financial support. Therefore, it was important not that the public like everything that we do or agree with everything that we do, but there at least had to be a feeling that the union and its president had a commitment to improving education, even if we disagreed from time to time on particular means, and that as a result of these four strikes, with a substantial part of the public we had really overstepped those bounds. Even people who agreed with us on some of the specifics came to just say, well, but enough is enough. There are times when even people who believe you're right just want the fight to be over.

MARCIA: It's very hard for people to withstand a whole lot of unfavorable stuff in the newspaper. It's very hard to keep your thinking straight even if you agree with somebody, if the people constantly get lambasted.

AL: Well, no, there are a lot of people who have a mindset that the newspapers are nonsense and so the newspapers are part of this and that establishment. There's a lot of skepticism about where the newspapers are coming from. The newspapers can do some influencing, but it's limited.

If people only had newspapers to get their news from, I would have been in very serious trouble. The newspaper coverage was, I thought, very inadequate and also very unfair.

But what created an independent public opinion which was substantially on my side and on the union's side was the existence of television -- and not so much television news coverage as the existence of these half-hour talk shows. I was on all through this period of time at least a half-hour show a week. And because of the confrontation, these shows had a tremendous listenership, and I was able to expose things on television that the mayor had said or that the board had said or that other groups had said, and take them on. And, in a sense, on television you have an independent access to the public. It doesn't get screened by what the reporter does. It doesn't get chopped out. There you are live, and whether you seem to be forthright and answering the points makes a lot of difference. We really scored a tremendous amount of support as a result of that. And that's why the newspapers really had less influence.

But nevertheless, when the strike was over I felt, and a number of our leaders in the union felt, that one of the main problems we had was to once again develop a feeling on the part of the public that the union did stand for better education.

Now I then tried to do a number of things to promote that. I tried

to see if I could get an article placed in the *New York Times* magazine section -- on education, not on trade unionism or on bargaining issues. Someone from the *Times* magazine section wanted to know who was going to write it. After all, I was just a union boss. I tried to get on to Edwin Newman's "Speaking Freely," and the response we got was, "Well, you're an interesting guy but you're just a local president of a local union and this is a national show. When you get to be a national leader, we can put you on the show." Eventually, I did get to be national president and did get to be on the show, but not at that time.

So there were a number of these efforts to see whether there was some way in which I could be in the public eye not just at a time when we were on strike or in negotiations, but where there was a way of getting into educational discussions. The interesting thing was that basically nobody's interested. If you're punching somebody else in the nose, they're all there, and that's of course how the image is created. If you call a meeting to talk about educational ideas, everybody yawns or they don't even show up.

So I at that point started thinking, well, maybe we need somebody to help us with public relations. I did some thinking and I thought of somebody that I had known who had been a journalist, and he had been in Africa and covered the emerging independence movements there and he had been a correspondent in Viet Nam and had worked for a while as the editor of the New York City Central Labor Council newspaper, which is where I met him. His name is Arnold Beichman. I asked my secretary to look for him, and she found him, and he was finishing a Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. I spoke to him on the phone and he said he'd been following me from afar and thought I was doing a very good job but

he had some ideas and if I would pay his way from Boston to New York he'd like to spend a day or two with me talking about these things.

So he came and started making some of the very same suggestions that I had; that is, write an article on education, see if he can get on this TV show, and so forth. Finally, after running through a list of things which were pretty much the same as the ones I had tried, he said, "Why don't you become a columnist for *The New York Times*? I said, "They're not going to hire me. They're criticizing me every day in their editorials. They hate me." He said, "Buy it." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Suppose you had a piece of space every week on the op-ed page, same day each week, same space, and you were able to write an article. First of all, you could criticize their own coverage of the education news, and that would shape them up because they'd be worried about having their errors pointed out on their own pages. You could review new books that come out on education, and people would send you manuscripts and they'd be interested in your ideas and your endorsement. You could endorse candidates a week or two before the primary election. And most candidates, if you establish credibility with the public, would give their right arm to get an endorsement that could become one of the most valuable. And, of course, you can in this space talk about educational ideas so that over a period of time the public gets to know, first of all, that you really know something -- not just about how to conduct strikes or shut schools down -- but you know something about how to run them better than the people who are running them. And you could, over time, establish yourself as an educational authority. You won't be able to do it in any other way because there are various other avenues closed to you." He said, "However, don't even bother doing this if

you're going to have to check each of these columns with your executive board and if the column is just to be a house organ(??); that is, you cannot use this to promote the usual union stuff. This is not the place to say that teacher deserve a higher salary, it's not the place to say that the answer to all the problems is smaller class size, it's not the place to talk about the plight of secretaries or the fact there's no toilet paper in the restrooms, or this type of thing. Because, if you do, nobody is going to read it. You might as well save your time and your money. This really has to be you as a reader, as a speaker, as a thinker, as a person who discusses and argues and debates educational, political, social, human rights, labor issues. That means you have to be allowed to say what you want, even though the organization is paying for it.

"There aren't many organizations where the organization will allow the president to do that. Somehow they have to come to realize that if the public sees you as a reader and as a committed person, that it will have an effect on how the union is viewed. But it's not one of these direct things like what did you say in your column last week that will help bring home the bacon."

Now, this came at quite a good time because I had been to jail once for leading the '67 strike and I was about to go to jail again, I believe in the '68 strike. Both strikes were viewed as very successful. So I had a tremendous amount of leeway, and he did not turn this into a narrow type of union house organ(??).

Now, the interesting thing that happened -- this was a unique type of column and it created certain problems at the beginning -- a number of problems for *The New York Times*. You might think they'd be very happy

to get a piece of advertising which over the years would give them millions of dollars. At first they said no, they would not sell us a piece of the op-ed page. They since have sold it for purposes just like that, but at that time they said no. So we then said, well, what about the "Education" page -- the "Week in Review" page where it now appears used to be the "Education" page with a full page for education. It was then edited by Fred Hechinger, who was their education editor. They did finally say yes.

All the copy that was submitted had to be gone over by their attorneys to see if there was anything libelous. I once joked that if their attorneys went over the Pentagon papers with the same fine-tooth comb that they went over my columns, they would still be looking at the Pentagon papers and that they would still be unpublished.

Then they had other questions to resolve, such as, if I say something in one of my columns which makes news, which is newsworthy, should they run a news column on something which is an advertisement in their own newspaper. Indeed, they did. The very first columns I wrote made news. It was a very hard column to write. I sat in front of my typewriter for a long time, and I started by writing "Why this column?" explaining to the public why the column was being written. But the second part of it was "Harvey Scribner(??) Must Succeed." That was very surprising because Harvey Scribner was the fairly new chancellor in New York City, and he came in and started attacking all of us who were in the schools. He came in with sort of a bang and kind of nasty and with a chip on his shoulder, so many people in the school establishment had already started calling for his removal. And I wrote a column, "Harvey Scribner Must Succeed," and in the column I frankly said that it didn't make much difference

whether I liked him or not but you can't run a school system with a revolving-door chancellor. You can't have people coming in and out constantly; and that all of us who were in the school system had a stake in developing continuity and therefore I was arguing that we give him a chance. That was surprising because all the other people inside were calling for his removal, and since I was viewed as the most militant of the lot and since he had been at least as nasty with the UFT as he was with other groups, I was expected either to lead the group in asking for his ouster or at least to join the chorus.

So one of the decisions the *Times* had was, do they ever have a news story. The answer was yes.

Another one that they had was, well, since I was going to be perhaps disagreeing with people, criticizing their ideas, attacking them, criticizing their books, etc., would the *Times* give an opportunity for people to write letters to the editor disagreeing with me. After all, I'm not a columnist; I'm an advertiser. They had some discussions on that and the answer was yes. Then they had to decide whether they would ever either take issue with me or cite me in their editorials, and the answer was yes.

Then I guess finally -- they do polling, and my column is one of the popular readings in the paper -- and what they finally did was actually put me -- I am in *The New York Times* index, indexed column by column, as though I were a paid columnist -- the only advertisement in the newspaper that's treated as editorial material.

The impact on the membership, initially it was very, very strong, because many members read it and it was clipped out in each school -- the union representative would usually clip it and post it on a bulletin

board -- but aside from that, one of the major parts of the impact was that teachers would find that their brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, uncles, boyfriends, girlfriends would talk to them about what Shanker wrote last week or two weeks ago, and usually they said something favorable like, "I agreed with what Shanker said," and that got members to realize the powerful impact. A lot of people were reading it and discussing it.

I think one of the interesting things you might pull out is, some years later after Scribner left the city, one of Scribner's assistants wrote a hit piece on me -- I think two of them -- in the *Kappan*. And one of the things they said in the *Kappan* -- they kind of said that I get my power -- and they mean gets power in a lot of fraudulent ways -- and one of the fraudulent ways they claim was that I make believe that I'm a *New York Times* columnist. Anyway, it might be interesting for you to pull that out and also to get the response I wrote to them in a subsequent issue.

I guess at some point I should give you some of the anecdotes around this. For instance, you read the one about does Pavarotti have an aria plan? Well, I got a note from Pavarotti saying that I was absolutely right, saying he doesn't have an aria plan.

As a result of the column, I do get a lot of manuscripts and articles from people. Beichman's predictions have turned out to be true. When I was in Thailand, I was representing the International Rescue Committee and visiting various refugee camps of boat people and others, and I received a note in my hotel letter box saying that the Prime Minister, Kreingsak(??), was inviting us to dinner. So we got to this hotel, and as we walked in to the Prime Minister's dinner -- the Prime Minister

wasn't there but there was a little musical combo that was playing and there were five or six Members of Congress and a few members of the military. We were having cocktails and in came the Prime Minister and the musicians then played the appropriate music for his entry, and he walked right past the Members of Congress and came up to me and said, "Mr. Shanker?" And I said, "Yes." And he shook hands with me and said, "I usually agree with your columns, but the one you wrote two weeks ago was just terrible." And the Congressmen were all standing around waiting to shake hands with him and watching the Prime Minister.

A few years before that, I was in London and went into a theatre, but before going in I picked up a newspaper at a newsstand just outside the theatre, and the fellow at the newsstand looked at me and said, "You're Mr. Shanker, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes, how do you know?" And he said, "Well, I've been going out with a New York teacher this summer and she gives me your column every week."

MARCIA: And then there's the most recent story in Budapest.

AL: Yes.

MARCIA: Did you have any thoughts that it would give you that kind of immediate access to people that television gave you?

AL: No.

MARCIA: Nobody editing you, nobody standing between you and them?

AL: No, I did not at the time. I really did not realize that over a fairly short period of time I could get a very widespread readership among government people, business people, general public, colleges and universities, etc. And what I didn't realize was that there was no other single place in -- most other countries have national school systems, and therefore there are frequent articles about education in the nation.

Whereas, because education is local in the United States, with 16,000 separate school districts, basically most newspapers carry their own local stuff and there is no national dialogue in education. For instance, in all these other countries -- in England, there the London *Times Educational Supplement*, which has a very large circulation. In France, Germany, every one of these countries, you have national magazines and newspapers that are rather widely read. In the United States, even educators don't have anything they widely read that's national. So this became something in what comes as close to anything as a national newspaper that was available across the country to deal with issues that were being discussed across the country.

Also, because of my interest in reading educational literature, it's one of the few places where readers can get a translation and analysis of some of the more interesting research findings in education. For instance, the first place in the United States where anything appeared on the Michael Rudder book, *15,000 Hours*, was in my column. And then it was discovered by the rest of the press. I discovered it because I subscribe to several British publications, and I read the reviews there and sent for the book from England before it was published in the United States, and there were really quite a number of articles and research pieces that probably never would have come before the American public. Once they appear there, of course, they are read by other education writers. So it's kind of a magnifying effect. But the dissemination of all this was quite an important one.

The person who commented on that to me last year was Lee Schulman. Do you know him?

MARCIA: I know who he is. What did he say?

AL: He was commenting to other people about how important it is to the general public -- getting stuff that Lauren Resnick wrote -- some of the main issues that the research community understands but very rarely get to the general public.

MARCIA: I was thinking about that today. I was thinking that you will have written 1,040 columns by the time the 20th anniversary comes up -- or close, it makes no difference. I was thinking about whether you'd ever wondered whether it would have been better to put all this work into another forum or into longer pieces or into something -- a different way. But from what you're saying, clearly the general public is what you wanted to --

AL: Yes, that's right, it was the general public, especially policy makers but pretty much general public. Now that created some problems. From 1969 to 1974 when I became AFT president, the column was totally paid for in that period of time by the teachers' union in New York City. It may be that NYSUT started around '74 sharing the costs. But basically it was paid for by the New York City local. And finding a topic and writing about it in such a way had to be done with a considerable amount of care, because on the one hand, while I had a considerable amount of freedom, New York City teachers, union members, had to over this whole period of time continue to believe that it was worthwhile paying for it. So I always did have to think of -- if not every column, at least every second or third or fourth -- is there something here which will be appealing to teachers, even though I wasn't mostly writing it for them.

Secondly, was it's interest to -- what most of the readers would be is people in and around New York.

But then the third is, it couldn't be just a New York thing, even

though those were my interests in concentration -- that's where I was living and working and that's who was paying for it -- but it's a national newspaper and what will people all across the country who are reading this -- will they turn off on it or will it be something that they read?

Now, of course there were just times when the conflicts in New York were so great or something happened that I had to spend quite a number of columns on those. And those people across the country, I still try to write those in a way that would make the New York City conflict or trials and tribulations interesting to them elsewhere. But I had to essentially take care of a number of different audiences and constituencies simultaneously, and that was not easy. But I think over time it worked out pretty well. There were a few exceptions, a few that were thrown to one audience or another because something had to be done, but very few.

MARCIA: It's easier now. I can see that change reading the columns over again.

AL: It's much easier now because it's paid for by the national, with some contributions by New York State because it is *The New York Times* -- there's a presence there.

The other thing is that even with all the leeway I had, if you're in some terrible struggle in New York City, and the New York City teachers are paying for it, to write about something that deals with some piece of research or something that is distant, seems to them to be saying that the fight that we're in right now doesn't deserve the attention of the president or the organization. It would be like fiddling while Rome burns. I mean, here we are in the middle of this terrible fight, we're getting killed, and there he is writing about what research says about

the effects of this type of pupil grouping or what's the matter with him, where is he going?

So it is easier. As national president, I'm still free and I do zoom in on some particular state or locality but I'm not usually caught in that.

It was especially difficult when I was president of both, because I obviously then had an obligation to the national organization to promote the overall interests of the national organization in terms of a set of priorities, and simultaneously as local president a set of issues which didn't conflict with the national issues but which were just a part of those national issues.

MARCIA: When New York City was about to default, there was a subject that was of interest to everybody, and I noticed actually, now that I think back on it, that you made the possible default of New York City -- put it in a broad context -- what'll happen to the country if that happens. Those were good columns.

AL: It was a very painful period of time. Those were written with tears.

MARCIA: Very few of your columns are angry, though. There aren't very many columns where you dump on anybody. There one where you dump on Ed Koch.

AL: How about Madame X?

MARCIA: Yes.

AL: Marilyn Cottell(??). She still around and she's still the same bitch she always was; still a union hater.

MARCIA: And Bella Abzug gets it, and Wilford Shee(??) whom I like as a novelist got it. But really they didn't have to worry about libel

suits, although they didn't know that at the time.

AL: I think in all the years, they only asked me to change two words and I don't even remember what they were; it didn't mean anything.

MARCIA: I wish we could include one of the Ed Koch columns, though probably it's pointless because it talks about -- the point is empty words in P.R., you'll political speak, scoring, rather than saying anything that is truthful. I think we probably -- since there'll only be room for about 60 columns, it probably wouldn't be worth doing that. But it was good.

AL: Only 60?

MARCIA: Yes. It's a 250-page thing. So I haven't figured it out exactly.

AL: How about an index to all the others? Will they put that in?

MARCIA: I don't know. We can ask them. That would be interesting.

AL: If they don't, we should. We should have an index.

MARCIA: Well, you know, Doug's part of the way there.

AL: Does he have key words and references to books and people?

MARCIA: Yes.

AL: We could put out an index and then -- well, if we sell them, you know, whatever, run them off.

MARCIA: Yes, it would be great. Of course, you get them all in *The New York Times Index*.

An obvious question is the evolution of your thought and what you know you've changed your mind about?

[Interruption]

AL: I could write that same column again. However, where I've changed is that both that and the tax credits and vouchers -- that while

I still think that those are bad ways of doing it and pretty much for the reasons that I gave originally, I now feel that while those were the wrong answers that the people who were raising those issues were raising the right question. And the right question is: How do you get people to do the right thing? How do you move them from where they are to where they ought to be? And the notion of incentives and motivation, the notion that people do not in the long run necessarily do what is the good or right thing. And that a certain amount of extrinsic motivation has to be there along with all the intrinsic motivation. That has come to be very strong.

MARCIA: What made you decide that the AFT ought to move forward in school reform? Was it a conversion or did the idea come on you gradually?

AL: No, it really goes back even before the column. You've got to remember that what was there outside the AFT and the union was the notion that teachers were professionals. And that was used by management and the old NEA. Of course, what they meant by professionalism was basically docility. So part of the job of the union was to argue against that definition of professionalism and to argue that true professionalism dealt with empowerment, the power to do the things that needed to be done, and that occurred fairly early.

But also very early -- the whole business of the concern on these issues -- that is, what members want because it enhances their -- gives them more money or more security or something else -- the relationship between that and educational and professional things came up at the very beginning. For example, in June 1961, New York City teachers were to have a referendum on whether or not they wanted collective bargaining.

And in December of that year the first collective bargaining election was to take place.

While that was going on, this issue of unionism professionalism was playing itself out in the United Federation of Teachers in New York City. It played itself out in the following way. A group of black parents had kept their kids out of school, they engaged in a school boycott, at Junior Highs 136 and 139 in Manhattan. The board of education took the parents to court saying they had violated the compulsory education law in keeping the kids out. They were represented by a black attorney -- whose name I'll think of in a couple of minutes --

MARCIA: The parents were?

AL: The parents were, those in Englewood, New Jersey. He argued that the parents could not be compelled to send their kids to inferior schools. What he did was present a chart to the judge, and the chart showed that in schools that were predominantly white, something like 60 percent of the teachers were regularly certified teachers and 40 percent were on temporary or permanent substitute licenses; whereas, in predominantly black schools the reverse was true -- 60 percent were substitutes.

The judge who heard the case was the daughter of Rabbi Steven S. Wise(??). Her name was Justice Wise Polliet(??). She ruled on behalf of the parents. Now the board of education had a problem because there was a court decision that essentially gave minority parents the right to boycott schools and keep their kids out in violation of the compulsory attendance law.

What did the board of education do then to try to remedy the situation? Well, the board of education went to Albany, New York, to

propose legislation to grant regular licenses to all these substitute teachers.

MARCIA: It's like the black tests.

AL: Now the union had always stood for the merit system; that is, that you should not give licenses away and that licenses should be based on meeting standards, which in those days meant the competitive examinations given by the Board of Examiners. However, a huge percentage of the people who were members of the union were these substitutes. They were disproportionate as members inside the union. And there was this big fight within the organization. Some of these substitutes argued that why should they have to suffer the status they had when a paper and pencil test really didn't tell you whether a person was a good teacher anyway.

So just as we were coming into the election, the union took a very interesting position. It opposed the granting of these licenses to substitutes. However, it called for a new system of licensing in which a major portion of the assessment would be an internship period during which probationary teachers who had passed the required written test would finally be judged adequate on the basis of actual performance in the classroom.

Now, that story has never been written, and there are documents on it.

MARCIA: That was the Toledo peer review system 20 years early.

AL: There was a big argument as to whether principals or teachers -- we could dig out what that internship was, but teachers had a major role in it. So that was one major issue.

There was another one that came up shortly after we got collective

bargaining.

MARCIA: So what happened to that proposal?

AL: Essentially the legislature -- the board of education's bill was modified but it went through. But they didn't just give licenses to substitutes but they did give them what's called a closed examination, an exam that only they can take. It probably did move the standards downward a little bit, but not to the extent that would have happened. At any rate, the whole thing was governed by shortage. And to this day they continue issuing them, except now they're called Temporary Per Diems.

At about the same time, there was another issue which dealt with these issues, and that was the superintendent of the schools -- on this same issue, because the courts had said that he didn't have experienced and regular teachers in minority schools -- the superintendent of schools came out with something called forced rotation or forced transfer, in which he said the school system should transfer experienced regular teachers from predominantly white schools where there were more of them into minority schools. That created a terrible problem for the union, because on the one hand we did want to staff these minority schools; after all, one, you had to have it for a good education, two, we had our own members who were suffering there because there was a shortage of experienced teachers in the schools. But, on the other hand, we did not want to be in a position of taking teachers who perhaps had taught in schools like that for 15 years and then finally, through seniority and a transfer plan, manage to get somewhere else -- tell them that after all these years of looking forward to being somewhere else, they were now going to be forceably returned.

So we campaigned against the forced transfers and killed them, but we didn't just say, all right, we killed it, we were powerful enough to do that, but we formed a committee in the union, which included Elliott Shapiro -- I don't know if you ever read that book about him -- Nat Henthoff(??) wrote a book called *Our Children Are Dying*, about this wonderful principal in East Harlem. It's still worthwhile reading. He's the only principal in Harlem who turned out hundreds of parents at parents' meetings. He unfortunately dying now, he's very sick. Must be about 90 -- but a lot of outstanding psychologists, social workers and educators, and what we said was that forced transfer was the wrong idea because the reason teachers didn't want to transfer into these schools is the conditions were intolerable.

The superintendent then said, well, why don't we pay people more to work in those schools, and we label that combat pay. People are going to be paid to endure the combat, but that it was still going to be a combat zone. It wasn't going to substantially change the educational nature of it.

This committee came up with something called the effective schools plan, which proposed year-round school, a longer day, it started school for kids at the age of 2-1/2 with a full-day program, it called for very good pupil-teacher ratios, psychologists, social workers. There was parental involvement, the whole thing. We adopted it as a priority item and actually managed to get the superintendent of schools to put that into 21 schools.

MARCIA: Do you have data on it?

AL: Oh, yea.

That involved taking monies that could have been used for all

teachers and concentrating them in 21 -- by the way, my own oldest boy was bussed into one of these schools in Bedford-Stuyvesant(??). And it wasn't just mine, but there were huge numbers of middle-class white parents that because the quality of the schools and the program was so great that there were middle-class parents lined up -- as a matter of fact, some of them were chartering busses to have kids taken in. So that the schools were becoming somewhat integrated.

MARCIA: So they were magnet schools along with everything else.

AL: Yes, they were the first magnet schools.

Well, they didn't last long because the board of education got rid of them not much later. But the fact is that from the very beginning there were things we did which were difficult from the union point of view. It was difficult in a system with 1,000 schools to take a large sum of money and then concentrate it into 21 schools, because the tendency is to divide it equally. But I should also say I learned something from the more effective schools, and that is basically in most of these schools the teachers and the principal left in June not knowing that their school was going to be selected to be an effective school. They came in in September and had twice the amount of money, so they had lots of extra teachers, psychologists, social workers, and without any rethinking or retraining, guess what a teacher does with 12 kids in a class: exactly the same thing she used to do with 30, stand up there and give the same lecture.

So that became sort of the beginning of my feeling that it would take more than money or mechanical reductions; that in order to really bring about change you had to rethink how things were done and you couldn't really do something that was mechanical.

MARCIA: The board of education killed them for financial reasons?

AL: Well, yes, they killed them for financial reasons.

MARCIA: But you don't think they were entirely successful anyway?

AL: Well, there's a big, fat piece of research on it, two volumes, nearly that thick (indicating), and without going through the two volumes -- and the guy that was the author was a guy named Box(??) -- what it shows is that the kids liked school more, had a better self-image, the teachers liked it more, the principals liked it more, the parents loved it, everybody gives it high marks. However, when you take test scores into account, there's no change. However, if you go into one of the charts in there, one of them is called "Impact of Pupil Mobility." What that chart showed was that if the students were in the program for three or four whole years that they made tremendous jumps, but there were very few students who were in it for that period of time. And if the student was only in it for one year, it had almost no impact.

In other words, how much progress -- what the chart purported to show is that the more kids move from one school to another school, the more they have a bad time in school and don't learn much.

MARCIA: Well, we do that already.

AL: But another way of reading this is, when you measured kids four years later where you're measuring the same kids. So if you said since the report says that those who were in it for four years made tremendous gains but very few of them were there, it essentially seemed to show that the problem with fact that or the reason that the scores didn't jump is that different kids were being measured, that the mobility rate in these schools was so high -- because they were the toughest schools in the system -- the mobility rates were so high that essentially, when four

years later you tested the kids, you were basically testing kids who'd been in the program for a short period of time.

MARCIA: It's still a problem.

AL: But back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I became very interested in a lot of the stuff that was being written on the open classroom -- Charles Silberman, the UFT gave him the John Dewey award. That's another piece where the school board in New York City -- I guess this is in the '70s now -- the school board, state commissioner, Ford Foundation, parents' groups, supervisors, all of them were on board to start a rather wholesale experiment with open education, especially in the elementary schools, and rethinking was done in junior high schools. They were all brought together for a sort of a city summit, and the person who shot it down was Harvey Scribner, because he wasn't the author of it and wasn't going to do anything that didn't originate with him.

MARCIA: Later on, you said some critical things, I think, about open classrooms. Do you think that would have worked then?

AL: I think the idea behind the open classroom -- it depends on what you mean by the open classroom. The open classroom meant a number -- a number of things had happened at the same time and some of the same people were involved in all of these. And there were several -- at least one or two -- bad tendencies. To some extent, the open classroom was linked up with the counterculture stuff of what right to adults have to determine what kids should learn. This is colonialism, imperialism, we ought to set the colonists free, and they should have a right to do what they want. So the extent to which this became just radical permissiveness, it was bad. Of course, to some extent it did become bad, not only in the open classroom but even in the regular curriculum with

all the phony choice and soft alternatives. So that was one piece of it.

However, the notion that -- I mean, to a large extent the open classroom notion criticized the idea of all kids having to do the same thing at the same time and the notion they should be passive rather than active. The open classroom, if it weren't combined with the counterculture, then it represented an effort to restructure schools on the basis of a more healthy and positive learning environment for kids. So all of that was very positive.

In retrospect, I feel now there was no way in which it could have worked at that time, mostly because it put too much of a burden on individual teachers, or even on a team of teachers with any given grade or school, because the kind of effort that is involved in developing all the alternative experiences for kids represents 20 or 30 times as much effort as standing in front of a room figuring out what you're going to say to a bunch of kids. And it's too much, and there's no way in which one person can do it. It is akin to the notion of saying that a doctor not only has to diagnose the patient and provide a prescription but he's got to invent the medicine, too. And inventing the medicine is the most difficult part and that's the one thing the doctor won't do; that really to do this kind of thing depends on two things.

First of all, it depends upon a profession in a sense that it's a community and that they have sort of a common stockpile of pills and medicines and technologies and so forth, and that means there's got to be time and methods for people to share and communicate so they don't all have to invent it on their own. That wasn't there then. It is now.

MARCIA: More.

AL: It is now in the sense of having a technology to do it. I'm not

just talking about people having time in one school or schools in one city. You have computer data bases now, and you have ways of -- the very fact you have fax machines and copy machines and VCRs with literally thousands of interesting plays and operas and computers with things that pop up -- all these things, basically for the most part

END TAPE #1

just talking about people having time in one school or schools in one city. You have computer data bases now, and you have ways of -- the very fact you have fax machines and copy machines and VCRs with literally thousands of interesting plays and operas and computers with things that pop up -- all these things, basically for the most part....

[End of Tape 1]

[Break - begin Tape 2]

... so one of these really said in order to reach an agree-upon goal, which the adult community establishes, you have to experiment and try different ways of reaching it. Of course, the other side essentially said, "what right do we have to force these kids to pursue that goal anyway-- we shouldn't even be suggesting goals. We're just the ticket agents, and they're the travelers, and we should wait until they come tell us where they want to go, and then we should write the ticket."

MARCIA: That's the bad job, Dewey.

AL: That's not John Dewey at all.

MARCIA: That's John Dewey misinterpreted.

Al: John Dewey was sharp. I mean, John Dewey wrote about those people. I mean, this is not just our version of saying that that's bad John Dewey. John Dewey said that it wasn't John Dewey. He repudiated that.

MARCIA: But still, John Dewey is tarred with that even now, isn't he?

AL: Well sure, but that doesn't mean that those of us who know better shouldn't defend his reputation. And there are a lot of things John Dewey didn't know. He raised the right questions, and he had the right feelings about things, and there are a lot of things he didn't end up with answers to. But I think that one thing is that he should not be tarred with the mistakes of some of his mistaken followers.

MARCIA: Oh yes, I bring it up because that is what people still say, so it's worth taking it up to bump it. I wondered, reading the columns, whether your ideas about, well, why education's important-- what the role of education is for kids. You can say that it's to make them good citizens and happy people and to make them part of one society as opposed to people who are marginalized by having different educations....

AL: Are you trying to get me?

MARCIA: No-- how you got into teaching, how you got into education, what brought you to the union movement....

AL: Well, when I was in high school, my high school year book, when the questions was asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" or "Ambition" or whatever, it says "Lawyer", and the reason it says "lawyer" is that I had read Clarence Darrow: Attorney for the Defense by Irving Stone.

MARCIA: You would have been a terrific lawyer.

AL: A labor lawyer. However, when I got to college and looked at a couple of law books... [mutual laughter]. My school career in general was kind of interesting, the courses that I enjoyed I worked like hell and did all sorts of extra things and was a straight-A student. The courses I disliked I either flunked or was on the border of flunking,

so I've got by-and-large bipolar [inaudible].

MARCIA: So which ones did you like and which ones did you hate?

AL: Well, I didn't like (though I have a talent for foreign languages) foreign languages. I liked mathematics, and so I had straight A's in high school in four years of mathematics. I think 100 on almost every Regents [?]; I may have gotten 99 on one. The same was true in college. At any rate, I started by majoring in history. I actually completed a major in history and wrote an undergraduate thesis and then went to the University of Minnesota in the summer of '48 and took a number of philosophy courses and decided to change my major to philosophy. I came back and had one more year. I finished college in three years with two summers.

MARCIA: What was your undergraduate thesis on, the history one?

AL: Well, the history one was on the Spanish Civil War.

MARCIA: And why did you go out of New York City to go to college?

AL: Oh, to get away from home [laughter].

MARCIA: But that must have been a tough thing to do financially or an unusual thing to do. I mean, wouldn't going to City College have been a natural move?

AL: Well, getting away from home was really it. Home was a very tense place, and my mother was willing to support me away from home. Now the University of Illinois [does he mean Illinois or Minnesota?] was basically free tuition, $80 a semester or something like that. I had applied to quite a few places. I was turned down by Harvard, for one. It's nice to be teaching there now. But basically, I was turned down at a lot of places because the GIs were getting out and I was not a GI, and colleges and universities were deluged with applications, and they

obviously for the most part gave preference to GIs, so it was tough to get in. And when I chose the University of Illinois, I don't remember, I was accepted at a few places and turned down at a few, but I chose the University of Illinois because I was supposed to have had a close cousin who was supposed to be there. But she died that summer. She got married and got killed in an auto accident the night she was married. I was a maverick kid, always doing things I wasn't supposed to do like I was into all sorts of religions as a teenager, which really bothered my parents a lot because they were sure I was going to convert. Then instead of lashing out at me, would send me a couple of dollars to buy whatever books I wanted. At any rate, the University of Illinois had had no more than 7,000 students attending there before the war or during the war, and they admitted 25,000 students. They basically admitted every in-state student who had a 75 average or above, and every out-of-state student who had an 80 average or above, something like that. So I then was told I was accepted, and I got an application for housing, and that came back in a few days. Of course, in red, it said "You can't squeeze blood out of a stone." So on Labor Day weekend 1946, I took a Greyhound bus from New York to, the first stop was Wheeling, West Virginia (where I got out to go to the toilet and someone took my seat) so I had to stand from Wheeling, West Virginia to Indianapolis. When I got to Champaign-Urbana, it was boom time. You had to wait in line for 45 minutes to buy a hamburger. I mean, this was a small town that was accustomed to 7,000 students, and here are 25,000, many of them GIs with their families, trying to get fed, trying to find housing. I went all around the place and was almost ready to give up when I got an idea, rented a bicycle, and started bicycling out of town and stopping by farmhouses. Seven miles

out of town there was a farmhouse where they said, "Yes", they had a room to rent; however it was non-single. I looked for somebody else too, and that was my first room. The next problem was to get at least twelve points registered for courses, at least twelve points. Well, no computers in those days; you had to stand in these long lines. And just when you thought everything worked out as you were trying to get your last two or three points in, one closed or they only had one where you had to knock another one out, so actually 7,000 students left during registration week. They either could not get courses or housing, so that cut it down to 18,000. After a month or so, I managed to look around and was able to get a bed in what used to be the ice skating rink. They had 500 double decker beds set up in the ice rink, army style, with the little metal locker for everybody. It was reasonable-- $50 a semester-- and you could get a meal ticket, you could get all the meals for a week for I think $12.

MARCIA: You had to study in the library.

AL: Well, there was a big study hall right in the ice rink, and the library was only two blocks from the ice rink, so most of my time I actually lived in dorms like that. I later moved to a smaller dorm in an old gymnasium, which had 500, about 150 [?] double deckers. Anyway, the University of Illinois. I ended up being a philosophy major. Graduated with honors in philosophy and applied to Columbia University graduate _____ty of philosophy and was admitted. I was admitted in 1949. I did well there. They have two comprehensive examinations. One is called Four Fields of Philosophy and the other is the History of Philosophy, and I guess I did well enough on those so that I was given two assistantships. One was a research assistantship, and the other was

essentially marking papers. That was for Professor Charles Frankel [sp?] who was later brutally murdered.

MARCIA: That's your link with William Bennett, or one of them, isn't it?

AL: Well, he was Bennett's mentor when Bennett was a liberal Democrat. Well, I think I was considered one of the better students in graduate school. However, there were a number of things that didn't work very well. One, is that it was almost impossible to get a job in philosophy, even after you got a Ph.D. A close friend of mine who did get his Ph.D. ended up selling L_____ vacuum cleaners and doing all sorts of things and he's still in business today, so he never got into philosophy, so that was very discouraging. A second very important thing was I just seemed to be incapable of writing a dissertation. Every time I sat down to write one or two pages, I realized I hadn't read eight or twelve books that I needed to read. And I had a phenomenological, I wouldn't say photographic memory-- it wasn't the snapshot memory, but I had kind of a panoramic view so if you would take one word or idea like the concept of analogy, I could tell you which pages of which dialogues played over, used the term, and how Aristotle had changed it and then move on through philosophy. All that is very good for some purposes, but it's also kind of paralyzing when you try to write something and try to get the fullness. The minute you write a word you're starting to say, "Well, should I explain in which sense I'm using it?". So I was doing very well as far as being a student and as far as passing my courses, but I wasn't able to do the thing I needed to do which was to finish the dissertation.

MARCIA: What was your subject?

AL: Well, I was mostly interested in an American philosopher who actually I was interested in before, but that period of time there was a substantial amount of interest in him because he had written a book on ethics which was, well, one reviewer ranked it with Spinoza. His name was Elijah Jordan, and I guess it's had to categorize him, but he ran counter to all the trends of the time. He was sort of in a traditional _____. British idealism. Hegelian. Aristotelian and Hegelian. And he was very nasty towards the pragmatists and especially nasty to the logical positivists. But I was mostly interested in him because one of the fundamental concepts which he used was in his Ethics and his Metaphysics was the concept of the institution. He was basically anti-subjectivist, that is, he was against those philosophies that level everything down to feelings or sensations. You could tell that by the title of his ethics book, which was called The Good Life. I met him a couple of times and had some correspondence with him. But I was very much interested in Dewey and Santyana [sp?] and Freud and a pretty broad range. I was also very much interested in how this philosopher and John Dewey and others related to very sociologists. I took courses with Robert Merkin [?] and C. Wright Mills [?] at Columbia so was very interested in that work. So it was mainly the interface between philosophy and sociology, political philosophy and ethics. Well, I said there were three things: one was may inability, my compulsiveness, my perfectionist attitude and inability to move on the dissertation. Secondly, I married very young and by 1952 I had been married for three years and I had not worked and I felt pretty guilty about that. My wife was working; I had never worked at all except for part-time jobs, and so there was a need. And she was a teacher, and I think her salary about

that time was about $1800 a year which even in those days didn't get you very far.

MARCIA: That's the salary I started at in 1954.

AL: So the second thing, well I kind of ran out of patience and ran out of money, and I felt that if I took off for six months or a year, made some money and did something else and unwound that I could then return and finish the dissertation. That was my intention. So I went, in those days, even now, they got rid of the Board of Examiners but if you wanted a job you find out when the exams would be. I went down and took an examination. I did not have very many education credits, I think I had either 6 or 9 credits, and I went down and took what was then called "Common Branches" which was the elementary school examination, and it was the substitute Common Branches examination. I flunked the first time I took the examination because there was a speech exam. If you flunked the exam, you had to write to find out why, so I found out why. They said I had certain "foreign-isms" in my speech in terms of accent, and they gave me some exercises to do. I was supposed to stand in front of a mirror every morning and say things like "Look at the lovely, yellow lilies." (I still remember that one very well.) At any rate, I took it the next time around and passed. In those days there was this thing called the school page, and it started out in the New York Sun in 1922 or 1923. It had one editor from its inception in 1921-22 until its demise in the World Telegram & Sun in 1968, I think. A fellow named Jacob Jacowitts [sp?] who used to be a teacher. At any rate, that was a full-sized newspaper page, five days a week, in the first edition of the newspaper, and it contained local, state, and national news. It also contained sample questions on the examinations, gave sample answers, and

it also contained a thing called "Teacher Exchange" so if schools needed teachers, there would be what looked like ads at the bottom saying "PS So-and-So needs". So I looked in that, and I found that PS 179 in Manhattan needed teachers, and 179 was not far from Columbia University. So I thought that would be good. I could teach and after 3:00 could do some work after school. 179 was on 102nd St. between, just east of Amsterdam Avenue, and it was a school that was every day adding 20 new Puerto Ricans kids who were getting off the planes from Puerto Rico. This was the time of the big Puerto Rican influx. I had a sixth grade class. I was absolutely shocked because I remember the schools I had been in which were all very heavily, even from the first grade, heavily tracked, and except for a short period of time, one year, I was always in the top track, and so there were all these well-behaved kids who say there with their hands folded, and the worst thing anyone did was to pass a note or chew gum or get caught putting a girl's hair into the ink well or some sort of prank like that. But here's a class where here in the sixth grade the kids were pretty big and tough and using foul street language and screaming and yelling, and some of them spoke no English at all. A few of them had just come over.

MARCIA: What happened to their teacher?

AL: I was the fourth teacher that they had had that year. They drove three others out. That's what happened. I remember a number of things about the school. One was that I was really in a state of shock and was kind of asking myself why I was there, why had I gone to college, and what was I going to do there? In a way, one of the big incentives to going to college of course, it was always talked about by my parents from the time I could remember there was never any question that this was my

destiny, but also one of the reasons was I grew up in a working class pretty poor neighborhood which was quite violent. One of the driving forces to going to college was to get out of that sort of violent life and be in a different kind of neighborhood and be with a different kind of people. And here I was, gone to college, very close to a Ph.D., and there I was locking myself into a room with kids who were exactly the kids I was trying to run away from. [Laughter]

MARCIA: A slightly different ethnicity, I expect.

AL: Yeah, well at that time it was fairly well integrated. There were a substantial number of white kids, and a few of them white, middle-class kids who lived over on West End Ave., some black kids, and lot of Hispanic kids, but still it was an integrated school. It wasn't truly after that. A couple of things. There was a district superintendent who used to come by to inspect the school, and one of the first things I learned I was on the fifth floor, and right next to my room was the gymnasium. There was always a kid in the gymnasium. It was a kid who was pretty disruptive. Teachers were always asking the principal to take him out of the class, so he was giving a full-time job of standing near the window in the 5th floor gym to look for the superintendent's car, whenever the superintendent's car came he ran down to the office and rang a gong. Now the reason for ringing the gong was that this superintendent had a rule. He felt that if you are really a good teacher in a good school, that every classroom needed to have a poster outside the door which would tell anyone walking by what unit the kids were studying. In those days all elementary schools had some comprehensive unit; you taught everything through it. You taught reading, writing, your math examples were taken from that, and social

studies.

MARCIA: It's like you were doing Eskimos.

AL: Or Lower South America, or whatever. You would do some unit and try to tie everything in. Well, of course this is the kind of school where if you put a poster outside your door, in about 3 minutes it had a lot of dirty words on it, and in about 15 minutes it was just ripped to shreds. So the way the teachers handled it is when you started a unit, you would spend half a day and have each kid make four or five posters of the unit. You would put those posters in the closet. Then whenever the gong rang, there was a student who was assigned to go to the closet, take out a poster, and put it outside so the superintendent's wishes could be taken care of. [Laughter]. The other early remembrance I have was that I really did <u>not</u> know how to control the kids. The first day that I described in the column about trying to get the kids seated and calling their names out and have the kids deny that that was who they were, and spending hours having the kids laugh at me because they knew each other and I didn't know who they were, and they knew how terrifying that was.

MARCIA: And much worse than a standard first day, because in a standard first day at least they haven't cohered yet in a group. Even if some of them know each other, they don't have a sense of being together as a group that they get as the year goes on.

AL: Yes, starting in the middle of the year. Oh, I guess the real first experience I had was that the principal of the school, a man by the name of Sober [?] interviewed me, and he said, "Well, why do you want to teach?" And I said, "Well, I really don't want to teach. I want to get a Ph.D. in philosophy and teach in college, but I've run out of patience and feel I need to get away for six months or a year." "Well, we don't

want somebody who doesn't want to make a career of it." But the next morning he called me at 6:30 am and said, "come in!". So that was the nature of the baby boom shortage.

MARCIA: So who did you learn to control them?

AL: Well, I was kind of waiting for help and about a week or two in the semester of my time there, the door opened and their was an assistant principal standing outside the door. And I said to myself, "Thank God, now I'm going to get some help." And he just stood, I don't know whether I was physically waving him in or mentally waving him in, but he just stood there with his hand outstretched and his finger pointing as I kept asking him to come in, he just kept pointing. And then he said to me, "Mr. Shanker, there's a lot of paper under the desk seats there. That's very unprofessional." Then he closed the door and left. That was my first encounter with the word "professional" as a teacher.

The other big even in the school were the faculty meetings. They ran very long. The principal would just really read all the notices he had sent out during the month and underline it that he really meant it, that we had to get those forms in, and that we had to keep the records in a certain way, and that we had to do this and that. And after an hour and a half, two and a half of those things, there was something call the the TIC, which was the Teacher Interest Committee. They chaired the faculty meeting then, and they reported that they had sent get-well cards to teachers who were not well, things like that. But that particular year was the year that the principal had just been appointed in the school, so one of the jobs of the Teacher Interest Committee was to plan the annual faculty party which was to take place in June. And the Teachers Interest Committee came in with the recommendation that at this faculty party that

we buy a gold watch for Mr. Silver [?] and that we all contribute I forget how much but it seemed like quite a bit of money to us.

MARCIA: Why were you giving him a watch if he was just coming?

AL: Well, that was one of the things that divided the faculty. Should you given a gift to somebody who is just coming? There were those who believed that, well, bank presidents get gifts like that and principals are at least as important. There were those that regularly appointed teachers, tenured teachers, who would be there many years to reap the fruits and benefits of the watch given to him, whereas the substitutes come and go.... [Change tape to Side B]. Well, these meetings took place every month with just bitter fights, people weren't talking to each other.

MARCIA: Well, what happened about the watch? Did you give it or did you not?

AL: I think they gave it, and only the regulars paid for it, but people got to hate each other so much in the course of the argument that almost nobody attended the end-term party where the watch was given. At any rate, I joined the union right away, basically because that was my parents' orientation, and I grew up during the depression hearing about what life was like before unions, and there were at that time 106 different teachers' organizations. I think there was only one other member in the school.

MARCIA: There was only one union at your school?

AL: No, there basically wasn't any. There was a woman who came around once a year and collected money for something called The Manhattan Teachers' Association, that was $.50 a year. And there was another woman who came around and signed up people for the Teachers' Alliance; that was

$.50 a year. Most of these organizations were not organizations at all. They elected a president for one year. They collected $.50 in the way people go around collecting money from kids for the Red Cross, and almost all the money was used for end-term party to buy the outgoing president who had only served one year a gift, and that was the organization. However, the fact that people could join an organization, something they thought was an organization, for $.50 gave them a perfect excuse for not joining the union, which was in those days $18 a year. They said, "Well, I've already joined The Teachers' Alliance" and for $.50 they could get away with not paying $18.

MARCIA: So these 106 different "things" were, most of them, teachers' associations like that?

AL: No, they were not all like that. There were some real contenders. Ours was then called The New York Teachers Guild, Local 2. There was an organization call The Teachers' Union of the City of new York. That was the original New York City teachers' union that was chartered in 1917, and John Dewey had been a member of that for a while, and there were big fights in the '20s and '30s between the Communists and the Democratic Socialists. The Communists were never a majority or even close to it, but they used what are called "Communist tactics", namely that the union used to be governed by membership meetings. They were able to turn out almost all their people at the meetings, whereas the others couldn't turn out very many, and they just stayed longer. They waited until everybody had left; then at 11:00 at night or midnight, that's when all the resolutions passed and the next day they were given to the newspaper so that over a period of time, even though they had maybe 20% of the membership, they basically were able to elect a

president and elect the Executive Board who controlled the membership meetings. Also, in the mid-'30s, there was a big fight inside the union. The union at that time did not allow substitute teachers to join the union. They said you had to be a fully qualified teacher to belong the union. I've got to remember that union members in addition to being very committed to the labor movement, it was dangerous to be in the union. You wouldn't get promoted or you might get _____ [?] something there, or you might get sacked. So basically, those who joined the union were outstanding teachers. They were teachers who were so damned good that they knew that while they might suffer-- they might not become principals or something like that-- they knew they were so good that nobody would ever be able to fire them if they belonged to the union. And they had a very, very professional attitude about who ought to be in their organization. Well, in the early '30s, the school system wanted to save money, and so it stopped appointing teachers. It had a freeze on appointing teachers and instead used substitutes for $2 or $3 a day and called them in every day.

MARCIA: Just like colleges do now.

AL: Yeah, it's the same thing a lot of colleges do with part-time or adjunct.... So, the Communists, now the whole union, whether they were Communist or not, opposed this practice and wanted appointment to be made and opposed the exploitation. However, the Communists had a big campaign to admit the substitutes into the union as members, and the anti-Communists said, no, that would lower our professional standards. The Communists stayed one night until wee hours of the morning, and they passed the resolution and as a result lots of substitutes came in and joined and that gave the Communists an even greater block of support

because they had been the champions of membership for that group.

In 1935, John Dewey was appointed by the leadership of the local, which was still non-Communist, to conduct an investigation into what were the goings-on within the union and to make recommendations. And he wrote something called "The Dewey Report" in which he said that the Communists should be expelled from the union. 1935 was rather interesting as most of the intellectuals of the United States at that time supported the Communist Party candidate for president of the United States. They felt that capitalism was finished; the depression in the United States proved that; and if you look at the list of supporters for the Communist candidate, you see that John Dewey was doing something that indeed was running against the intellectual culture of the country. But he essentially said that the Communists in the union were not interested in teachers or in trade unionism, that they were trying to seek control of the organization for one purpose, that was to further the foreign policy interests of the Soviet Union, and that the teachers' union would never succeed in fulfilling its mission if it had to be engaged in a constant battle with the people who use unethical means, etc. Well, the fate of The Dewey Report was very interesting. It was taken to a membership meeting where it was to be voted on, and right in his report, it described the tactics of the Communists as waiting 'til midnight, and that's what happened in his report. People waited until midnight to vote on it, and by that time the Communists were in the majority, and they rejected his report. So there was then a debate among the anti-Communists as to what to do. Some wanted to stay and fight. They said, hey look, we've got a majority, why should we turn the organization over to them? Some said, you're never going to beat them at their game.

You can never be in an organization with them. There were actually several people in leadership had heart attacks in this struggle, and so there was a feeling they had those attacks because of the struggle. One never knows, of course. At any rate, most of the anti-Communists formed a new organization called The New York Teachers' Guild, which, because it couldn't be affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, since that charter was held by Local 5, The New York City Teachers' Union, the New York Teachers' Guild affiliated with the NEA. [Mutual laughter!]. The Guild, however, continued to proselytize within the AFT (there were some more problems in Philadelphia and Los Angeles and college locals) and in 1940, George Counts [?] ran for the presidency of the AFT on a single platform-- that if elected, he would expel the Communist locals. He won, and he didn't have the votes to do it so he conducted a national referendum. By a narrow vote, something like 52% to 48%, the membership voted to expel the Communist locals. The Teachers' Union of New York was expelled, and The New York Teachers' Guild became Local 2 of the AFT. The Teachers' Union then affiliated then with United Public Workers-CIO, the CIO was then not with the AFL, and they were shortly after that expelled from the CIO as well. However, The Teachers' Union continued to be a very influential organization. They had a dedicated group of members, almost as many as we had in The Teachers' Guild. They had a weekly newspaper, whereas we only had a monthly newspaper, and the newspaper was exceptionally well written. And they had two outstanding leaders, Rose Russell, and Abraham Letterman. They were very well liked and were very effective in Albany and the City of New Orleans [?]. They would have an annual conference which lots of politicians and legislators went to even during the McCarthy years. It was kind of interesting,

their members were being fired from the school system for refusal to testify, or basically for refusal to say whether they were members of the party and if they did say, who was in with them. And legally, they were denied the right, that is the Board of Education denied them the right, to use the letterboxes in schools to disseminate their papers and so forth, nevertheless they were quite effective. So one of the problems in organizing was that wherever you went to a school, there were two teachers' unions. One was The Teachers' Union of New York and the other was The Teachers' Guild, and they got into a big fight as to who was the real union, were we "red-baiters", were they "Communists". A lot of teachers avoided both. It's like the old joke during the McCarthy period where somebody, McCarthy, is asking one of the witnesses before his committee, "I understand that you're a Communist." And the man said "No I'm not, I'm a strong anti-Communist." And McCarthy said, "I don't care what kind of Communist you are!" Well, that's the way the faculties would respond to a debate about Communism or anti-Communism. They figure, well both of these organizations must be tainted.

So another strong organization was The Elementary School Teachers Association. There was a woman, her name is Johanna Lindloff [sp?], and she was a member of everything-- she was a member of The Teachers' Union, she was a member of The Teachers' Guild, but she was the president of The Elementary School Teachers' Association. Now for many years, our union had supported the idea of single salary. Elementary school teachers should earn just as much as high school teachers. And we did pretty much, on John Dewey's principles about the value of early education and about subject matter being no more important than early childhood development of the basics, and whatever. Then in 1947, single salary

came. And it did not come because we had convinced anyone philosophically. It came because there was a baby boom, and babies tend to go to elementary school before they go to high school, and so their was a shortage of elementary school teachers before their was a shortage of high school teachers, and the legislators were trying to figure out a way to raise elementary school teachers' salaries without giving the same raises to junior high and high school teachers. So they adopted the philosophical principle of "Single Salary." Johanna Lindloff [?] happened to be president of The Elementary School Teachers when that happened, and so she became the beloved of the elementary school teachers. They never joined any organization, most of them, at that time. They said,"She belongs for us". It also turned The High School Teachers' Association, which had been an all-professional organization, into a rabid group that now felt that literally, they wrote volumes saying that their property had just been confiscated. They viewed it as a Communist system, that something which was theirs and which they worked for and which they owned had been taken away from them. They had been expropriated, and in course in those days, lots of elementary school teachers were graduates of one-, two-, or three-year normal schools. Every high school teacher had to be, in those days, a college graduate. In addition to taking all the exams that elementary school teachers took, they also had to take subject matter exam. It had been that being a high school teacher was part of a career ladder in those days. Quite a few people started as elementary school teachers and then continued going to school and got a degree, then waited many years, took the exam and waited on a list and became high school teachers. That was a $1200 increase. Well that was a lot of money. It certainly represented as much of an

increase as one gets today by becoming a principal. So it's not that any money had been taken away from them, but it's that they now felt that "Gee, we didn't have to go to college." In any case, they became very rabid and bitter, and their whole purpose in life became to restore the differential.

So, those were the strong groups. There were The Teachers' Guild, The Teachers' Union, The Elementary School Teachers' Association, on paper The Elementary School Teachers' Association but really, the third strong group was The High School Teachers' Association. Now there came into being at this time a fourth group, called The Joint Committee of Teachers' Organizations, which essentially said, "we have 106 different organizations, and we obviously are divided on all sorts of things, but at least we can speak with a united voice each year and go in and demand a higher salary" and so a woman named May Anders Healey [sp?] put together this organization, and everybody sort of had to affiliate with it. The Teachers' Guild was affiliated for a while and then we got out of it and we were accused of breaking rank. So that was one of the issues. We were really caught in a terrible situation. If we remained in The Joint Committee, people could say, "well, you could belong to any one of these 106 and be just as effective. We all work through The Joint Committee." So The Joint Committee was really a way in which teachers could avoid making decisions about being represented by an organization. On the other hand, not playing ball meant that everybody could say "everybody's united except you guys. You guys do not work and play well." That became a bone of contention. Well, I only was at this school for the remainder of that year, this elementary school 179. I was living at the time in Astoria [sp?] in Queens, about three blocks from

the Queens side of the Tri_____ bridge. I then was able to move, in those days you were able to move as a substitute by getting another job somewhere else. If another principal offered you one, you could leave. So I got a job at Junior High School 126, Astoria Junior High School which was actually the school my sister had attended and not far from where I had grown up in Long Island City. There a number of us either were in the union before or just joined at the time. Dan Sanders, who later became our vice president, Solavine [?] who became vice president of the local in New York City, Dick Faler [?] who was very active, a guy named John Stamm [?]. It was one of those things that happens historically. It's like a lot of the Russian dissidents under the Czar who met in Siberia [laughter], but we had a group of people who decided that we wanted to do certain things in the school and in the district. We had lunch together every day, and we would socialize with each other on Friday and Saturday nights, and afternoons we would go out for pizza and beer and all of our discussions were who could be signed up, how we could change certain things, get the principal to change certain things in the school, how we could do certain things in the District. Dan Sanders became the editor of the monthly newspaper for the union, which in those days was a voluntary job. When he left a few years later and moved out of the city, I became the editor of the paper around 1955 or '56.

MARCIA: This was the city-wide...

AL: The "Joe Boaten" [sp?] it was called.

MARCIA: Were you interested, was it being in the same school as those other people that gave you the push toward unionism.

AL: Well, if I were totally isolated in a school on my own, I don't

think I would have been involved in very much activity. I went down to the union office once or twice. You know, you go down to the union office and what do you do? You get information. Since there were only two of us in the school, I guess I had the right to be a delegate and go down and represent the school in a once-a-month meeting. I think it would have been difficult to become active if I were in a place where there was no activity. I think that the fact..., well, the whole union was basically inactive at that time. There was one full-time professional, that was Dave Seldo, [?], and there was one person who was secretary/bookkeeper/receptionist, and there was a piece in a _____ on 23rd Street, a place that later burned down. Seventeen averment lost their lives. It was a loft building, lot's of roaches, mice. This period from '52-'58 there was not a lot of activity. The Executive Board, mostly old-timers, they were very brilliant people, a number of doctorates, some with more than one doctorate, they were people who you wouldn't find many of them in teaching today. They were depression products. People became teachers because it was a good job, or a job period. They were all of course, well you can imagine, when you have 7,000 people taking an exam for a job and ten people got appointed on the basis of rank list, while it may be that in those days you may have had to take the classroom teaching exam, a speech examination, two essay examinations-- one on content and one on pedagogy, and long multiple-choice sort of things which dealt with vocabulary and the subject matter and general knowledge. During the Depression you get 8,000 lined up and you get maybe 80 people of the 8,000 at the top of the list who get appointed, so you got people who were very well read and very good at writing. So an Executive Board meeting was a thrilling

experience. They didn't get much done. As a matter of fact, they basically didn't want to organize other people. Their feeling was, "we know who the good people are, and here we are. We're the people with the right attitudes towards civil liberties, civil rights, and we're brilliant and we read books and we know what everything is, and if we had an organization made up of all those other people out there, we wouldn't be what we are. We would just reflect <u>their</u> attitude. Matter of fact, they used to have a Membership Committee in those days. Nobody could just sign up to be a member. Membership Committee was mostly to see whether somebody who was a member of The Teachers' Union was trying to get in. We got very few applications for membership, but you were often, if they didn't know who you were or why you were joining, you were called down by the Membership Committee and they would interrogate you. Why did you want to join?

MARCIA: [Laughter] That's wonderful! A very "exclusive" organization.

AL: It was! But an evening on the Executive Board was an exhilarating intellectual experience.

MARCIA: So what did they talk about?

AL: Well, you would usually start with something being proposed in the legislature or something being proposed in the Board of Education and there would be a two- to four- hour discussion where people would get up and talk about how this effected by the Marshall Plan or the trends in post-war Europe and what the future competition is going to be and what the race is likely to be like with the Cold War, what is likely to happen here and how we should position ourselves, and what our views should be.

MARCIA: So it was a debating society, sort of.

AL: Yeah.

MARCIA: So they didn't have any ideas about trade unionism...

AL: They took cases to the courts, and they took appeals to the state commissioner, and some of these cases dealt with church/state issues, some dealt with civil liberties, some dealt with individual rights, some dealt with maintenance of a merit system. If the superintendent wanted to appoint somebody as the supervisor of science in the New York City school system, all under the law the other person had to pass a competitive examination with Board of Examiners, so the Examiners were ordered to make the exam. Five people took it, and the superintendent's choice came out fifth. So he waited three years until the list was exhausted and didn't appoint anybody. He then gave a slightly modified exam, and again his choice came down. He then gave his guy who had failed the exam twice as Acting So-and-So.

MARCIA: Well, they do that in the government all the time.

AL: Well, see, but the Guild went to court on that and said that they were trying to violate the merit.... I mean, it was kind of interesting to look at the kinds of things that the Guild was involved with.

MARCIA: So they had some educational and labor union ....

AL: Yeah, and they also felt that every year.... In 1917, the teachers' retirement system in New York went bankrupt, and so a new law was passed that created a new retirement system and created co-determination. That is, teachers elected three of the trustees and no investment could be made, no decision could be made, unless at least one of the teacher trustees voted. That is, if the teacher trustees remained

solid, you could block decisions. The same was true. You always had to get a vote on the part of management. So it was joint management of the pension system, and this was one of the things we did. We turned out a pension booklet, we did education on the various pension options, and we always elected an outstanding person to the pension board, so that was something else we did. Then during this time there was something called Staff Relations Plan, which was kind of a labor-management committee on a school level, where teachers elected a committee and they had the right to meet with the superintendent, and there was a grievance procedure, and we... [break in tape]