

Professor Peter Neumeyer
April 12-14, 2010
interviewed by Susan Resnik
for San Diego State University
~6½ hours of recording total
PART 1 OF 3 PARTS

SUSAN RESNIK: Today is Monday, April 12, 2010. This is Susan Resnik. I'm in Kensington, California, in the lovely home of Professor Peter and Mrs. Helen Neumeyer. We're about to begin an oral history interview for the university Archives and Special Collections at San Diego State University. This project is funded by the John and Jane Adams Grant for the Humanities.

Professor Peter Neumeyer conceptualized and developed the largest program for the study of children's literature, which is housed at San Diego State University, in the United States. He completed his undergraduate education, master's degree, and doctorate, at the University of California-Berkeley. He has taught at Harvard, SUNY-Stony Brook, Columbia University, West Virginia University, Rhode Island. He was a visiting professor at the University of Wales. At the University of West Virginia, he was chairperson. He has authored numerous articles, poetry, children's books. He's an educator and author and a critic.

He has won awards which include the Mildred Bachelor [phonetic] Honor Award for translating Quint Bucholtz's [phonetic] *The Collector of Moments*. And was also a recipient in 1996 of the George McKenzie Award for Children's Literature. Highlights also include writing the annotated version of *Charlotte's Web*, writing the introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of *Charlotte's Web*, and writing children's books in collaboration with Edward Gorey.

So without going further, I'd like to hear directly from Professor Neumeyer. Good morning, Professor Neumeyer!

PETER NEUMEYER: Good morning! I'm so glad you're here.

SR: I'm so happy to be here. Professor Neumeyer, I'd like you to tell me where you were born and when you were born, and a little bit about your family.

PN: Okay. And please call me Peter.

SR: I shall.

PN: Okay. I was born 1929 in Munich, Germany. My parents, my father was an art historian there. He was at that point in charge of public relations for the museums. The museums are a governmental complex in Berlin. I lived with my parents from 1929 until 1935, at which point my parents fled to the United States. We're all Jewish. I don't think any of us had ever been in a synagogue in our lives, we were totally assimilated. Well, I think it was 1935 all professional Jews lost their jobs in Germany. I believe that was 1935.

SR: Now German was your first language?

PN: German was my *only* language until I was six. When my parents came to the United States, Mills College in Oakland had a wonderful president who, contrary to the president of Columbia and of Yale—I think it was Butler at Columbia—there've been books about this recently about the anti-semitism then in Ivy League Schools—I just read a book about this—fascinating story—were not at all welcoming to Jewish refugees. Aurelia Rand Henry Rheinhardt [phonetic] was the president of Mills College here, and she had the brilliant idea of picking up fleeing Jews, Jewish scholars from Europe. She built up an art history

department; a dance department; a music department; Darius Miel [phonetic], who was one of my wife Helen's teachers here in composition; my father, an art historian. So my parents came here, to Mills. I'm not sure, I don't know what they were thinking, but they left me with my grandparents.

SR: Tell me about your grandparents and what your life was like in Germany.

PN: Yeah, okay. Well, the easier part of it, because I know so little about it, is my mother's parents were from Berlin, which is northern Germany. My mother's is a family of five siblings. My mother's father had, I believe, textile mills at that point, or it was somehow connected with the manufacture of textiles, and they lived in Berlin, and their children were thriving. I don't know when they left Germany. They left Germany sometime after that, and their children did, and those are fascinating stories in themselves—those children's stories. They went from—this is a story of the modern world—they went from Brazil to England to the United States. They spread all over. With my parents, some years of those first six years I spent in Berlin in the north, and then sometimes I would go south, to Munich, where my father's parents lived. And I really know much more about my father's parents. My father's father founded the Institute for International Law at the University of Munich. I have pictures of these people here—lots.

SR: Will you be able to share them with the archives?

PN: Sure, I can do that, happily. Here I am with my—I know they don't get in the....

SR: Oh, that's marvelous.

PN: That's the year I spent with Grandfather. I loved those people. I dedicated the annotated *Charlotte* to them.

SR: I noticed that.

PN: I loved them dearly.

SR: And their names were....

PN: Karl and Anna Neumeyer. The whole family is well documented. This book here (in German) _____, is my father's autobiography.

SR: And his name was Alfred?

PN: Alfred, yes. And this is from the family biography from a second or third cousin. These are all in German, and maybe I have a copy I can share with the library.

SR: I'm sure they would be delighted.

PN: I *think* I can. I started translating my father's autobiography for my own sons, and I got about seventy pages into it, so I've got a partial translation of it. Historically it's just utterly fascinating. There's a picture of that whole bourgeois layer of German Jews and their extirpation, their dissolution.

Grandfather, like all German Jews, lost his job in 1935. He was married to Anna. This is Anna. And Anna was one of the founders of the women's organizations of Munich in the 1920s.

SR: Wonderful picture, yeah.

PN: She was a socialist, so she early got into political trouble. They both wrote. She wrote, it was sort of.... What is this women's organization that helps us figure out the voting issues in our time?

SR: Oh, the League of Women Voters?

PN: League of Women Voters. Something like that, she set up. She was one of the co-founders in Munich. And there was a celebration of Bavarian women—very

big, wonderful celebration, with a big thick catalog. She played a significant role in that celebration, about ten years ago. And I lived with them. I have trouble with memory. I don't know—this is always a problem when I tell stories to my children—I don't know what is a real memory or a memory of a memory.

SR: That's often true, yeah.

PN: I'm not sure I'm telling something that I remember telling that way.

SR: Do you remember what school was like?

PN: I went to school, I'm not sure, part of one year. I was six years old. I remember being brought to school. As I remember it, my father brought me to school, but I'm not sure of that, because he should be in the United States by then. So I'm not sure how I got there. And all I remember of that school, which would be either kindergarten or first grade, was we were given readers, and there was a picture of Hitler in the reader, and we were given a picture of the chancellor, Hindenburg, whom Hitler put in as president. He was a stooge, sort of an Eisenhower kind of stooge. He was above reproach. He had been a hero in World War I, and we were to paste Hindenburg's picture.... No! we were given Hitler's picture to paste over Hindenburg's picture. Hindenburg's picture was in the reader, and we were given a new picture to paste over it. I remember—and stop me if I'm talking too much about this, because I can balance this any way you like.

SR: No, this is very interesting, because it's part of—you know, we're going to get to how you became interested in doing what you did, starting early with school.

PN: Well, I lived with my grandparents, my parents were in America, and I remember some of these things because when I got to the university here, University of California, in 1946, I was sixteen—I'd just turned seventeen. There was a literary magazine called *Oxidant*, and I started right away writing for that. And I wrote my memories of my childhood for that magazine in, I think, 1947. So that was only eleven years after the event. So things I don't remember this well now, I do remember because I can read them in that old edition. And I remember my story, anyway, of going with my grandmother to—there's a big, very Teutonic, public edifice called (in German) *Feltnhamer* [phonetic], "Field Soldiers' Monument." And every Sunday Nazi military would have a concert there. The populace would be teeming with diverse military. I was six years old, and there was one group of soldiers who'd wear long, flowing, gray capes, and helmets with enormous horsehair tassels. And these were so *stunning*, I was just bowled over by it. And [I asked] my grandmother, "What are those?!" And I remember she said, (in German), "_____, field police." Well, my grandmother didn't know a thing about it, and only recently I've looked up what's field police. That was some sort of a secret. It had nothing to do with these people.

But anyway, the Nazis, it was usually, I think—I'm not sure—it was pretty heavily S.S. That is, the real gangsters, the real thug unit, in their very handsome, I thought, black uniforms. And they would have these concerts and my grandmother would take me there, and I would have a little pointed bag with seeds in it for the pigeons. And we would feed the pigeons during the concert. And then after the concert there was a church, the name of which I've just

forgotten—it's still there—(in German) *Michaelskirk* [phonetic] I think, I'm not sure—where we would go right after the concert or during it. And there was a little mechanical affair, a little box, a little crèche, and you'd put a penny in the slot, and the Christ child would come out, down a track, and bless you, and turn around and go back. And the memory of that is so.... My grandmother always took me there, and that memory is *so* vivid.

At home then, on Sundays, I think it was—we lived on (in German) *Kerniganstrasse* [phonetic], which is still the American Consulate in Germany is on *Kerniganstrasse*. It's a *very* fancy street. It's as nice a street as there is in Munich. In those days it had houses on both sides, but now they're razed on the one side, and the English Garden, which is enormous, like Balboa Park in San Diego, the enormous park is right across the street. And we lived, our main quarters, the houses, belonged to my grandparents. It's still there, and Helen and I have visited it, and have relationships with the house, though it's not in the family anymore.

On Sundays, usually, as I recall, either the (in German) *almacht* [phonetic], which is the regular gray dressed fighting troops, or the S.A., the brown shirts, would parade in the street in front of us, in front of our house. And everybody would hang on their balcony a swastika flag. And my memory is—and I wrote this down eleven years after the fact, the same thing—I think it's really true, my grandfather—we didn't have a swastika flag in the house, I know that—my grandfather had an old checkered blue-and-white Bavarian flag from the Kingdom of Bavaria, the kingdom of Mad King Ludwig. And he would hang out

that checkered blue Bavarian flag on Sundays. And the troops would march, and it was *very* wonderful for a six-year-old.

SR: Oh, I can imagine!

PN: They had *lots* of music. They had kettle drums hanging over their horses' necks, and they would drum on one side, and drum on the other. And it was *very* striking. And there were Hitler Youth, little toddlers running around in brown S.A. uniforms, with little daggers at their belt. That was part of the uniform. And I remember asking my grandmother, I wanted to join the Hitler Youth.

SR: I can imagine, sure, it's exciting.

PN: She said no, I never understood. It was not an issue, but I remember I was very taken by them. My grandmother did take me to English Garden. I'm talking an awful lot about them, but they were the dearest people to me.

SR: Well, that's important, because it was the beginning, yeah. You were Jewish by birth, but your parents were very assimilated and not observant. Did you have any kind of religion?

PN: Zero, minus. My father was Catholic.

SR: When did he convert, do you know?

PN: I think probably, my guess would be 1927 or so—before I was born—for two reasons, I think, as I infer it from his autobiography, and from knowing him somewhat. There was a famous Catholic theologian who lived in Munich, Leonardo Bardini [phonetic].

SR: I've heard that name.

PN: And there are volumes and volumes [by him]. And he was a friend and mentor to my father. So one was the influence of Bardini, and the other was that my father's advanced study en route to his Ph.D. and shortly after that was all in Florence. And so it was in churches, with saints all around. It got into his system. I don't know that he was ever a devout Catholic, but the way I put it, he was a Catholic for esthetic reasons.

SR: That's very interesting.

PN: And his uncles—I can show you later, I have a very good family tree, it shows things pretty well—he had a grandfather named, I don't know, we'll look it up. There's Karls and Alfreds all through. And all these other people were *very* good Jewish citizens. One of them who ended up in Argentina was, I don't know, head counsel or judge for the Jewish community in some section of Germany. My parents were really out of the mainstream of that family, entirely. My father was *never* involved, in any sense civic-minded, and the rest of them were, really. His autobiography is interesting, but he was esthetic and impractical, and I don't know when he came to America. I just found the other day a piece of official paper which said he was planning to come to America for a year. He wanted a year's leave from his job.

SR: Do you think this was motivated in any way by feeling that something was going to happen?

PN: Well, '35, I keep wanting to know, because I keep wanting to know my own past. I keep wanting to know how stupid my parents were, and they were pretty stupid. By 1935, anybody would know, I think.

SR: But from what I have heard, I mean, particularly if your father converted, a lot of people didn't think that they were going to be among the whole....

PN: But plenty of Jews were being beat up, concentration camps were open by then. People were disappearing. My grandfather—I'm going to have to look this up, but I think in '35 he lost his job, so that would be the same....

SR: Step by step.

PN: Yeah, I think it's pretty obtuse. And if he *meant* it, that he wanted a year's leave of absence, that's bizarre, I think, but I don't know. These are mysteries in my life that I try to straighten out.

SR: Was your mother also Jewish?

PN: My mother was also, though.... If my father was secular, my mother was *super* secular. In late years she became so blatantly anti-semitic, which is not an unheard of phenomenon, I hear, also.

SR: Yes.

PN: So my parents came to Mills College, and at a certain point about a year later, they sent for me. My grandmother brought me over. My grandfather was writing.... And I have here, last year the Institute for International Law named its house, its building, Neumeyer House. They named that for my grandfather last year. He was no longer working, but he was working at home. And he turned out volume after volume of, I don't know, legal history. Strange, very strange, the sort of things that one—and just culturally, legal history from somebody up to the time of Barteles [phonetic]. Well, Barteles was an Italian legal entity in the year 1,000. So this is esoteric stuff, and this is six volumes, I believe. When they

dedicated Neumeyer House last year, I wrote up a piece about Grandfather. I pulled together all the things, and I'll give you that.

SR: Oh good!

PN: That saves telling that long story, which isn't interesting to everybody.

SR: But clearly, your grandfather and your father, you had such a scholarly rich environment.

PN: Yeah. And I might say there was not a children's book in it. There were lots of books with pictures, and I have some of them here, a couple of them still. They were books of folk and fairy tales, but whether that is for children or not is sort of up in the air—could be part of medieval studies. But they did have wonderful pictures. And I did, in my grandparents' house, have that. I have my father's books, which were bound volumes of boys' magazines from World War I, which he was *just* too young to be a participant in. There was a revolution in Germany the year after World War I, and my father was conscripted into some sort of a revolutionary troop in that, and had very short-lived military adventures. He was thrown off a bridge once, but really it was after World War I. In those days, sort of a quasi-military Boy Scout movement was rampant in Germany. And my father was *very* involved in that. It was not Nazi. It was rather reactionary, though.

SR: Well, you know, I was just thinking about, from just what I have learned, the rise of Hitler, all this, because Germany had such economic problems, and it was a sense of wanting to lift the spirits (PN: Yes.) and have people be proud. So I can see how that could appeal.

PN: Yes, indeed. Grandfather, by the way, was a delegate to the Hague for the peace negotiations. They died in 1941, so 1935 to '41, that was....

SR: Now you came here....

PN: Grandmother brought me. She was wonderful. She was a wonderful woman, and she wrote—and I have that here, and I did translate that too—she wrote about a fifteen-page story of the trip to America, viewed through the eyes of the little boy.

SR: Oh, how wonderful!

PN: That's the kind of woman she was.

SR: Have you translated that?

PN: I've translated it.

SR: I would love to look at that.

PN: I have a translation of that. I don't remember the trip.

SR: How special was that?!

PN: It's incredible! It's incredible. It's incredible. So I have that. I have the original and I have my translation of it. And when we're not on sound, I can show you these things.

SR: Okay.

PN: So she brought me to California, delivered me....

SR: And then she went back?

PN: And then she went back. She stayed about a week. My grandfather couldn't get out, his passport had been taken. He couldn't leave. So he was a prisoner, in effect. She went back and my father has a brother, Fritz, who had fled to Sweden. A very nice man. Helen and I would visit him in later years, and he would visit us

in Massachusetts. So Karl and Anna had two boys, and stayed in touch. In the early summer of 1941, they went to Austria on vacation. How they did this is.... They had taken me there. I remember memories from when I was a little child, and they would take me. My grandfather was really a significant mountain climber. He'd take off periodically with his ice axe. So they would go to Austria on vacation. They always did that, and they did it when I was with them. And I remembered that and wrote about it in that 1947 essay. In early 1941, I was in America, my grandparents went to Austria. They wrote their children and.... My grandmother's closest friend was the wife of Max Weber [phonetic], of Marianna Weber. And this story is told pretty much in the autobiography of Marianna Weber, Max Weber's widow. Wrote a letter, which I have a copy of, and wrote her children a somewhat coded letter, telling them, in effect, what the next step was, which was that they would go back to Munich. And they, as the reports have it—and I'll tell you about my main source in a moment—lay down in the kitchen, wrapped in blankets, and looking very ... cozy isn't the word, but looking very together, and left a message for the cleaning woman, not to open the door, because there was gas. I should say, at this point, they knew perfectly well within a day or two that they were going to be out of their house, and they would be headed for wherever, whatever camp. They were on the brink.

SR: So they knew.

PN: They knew in the next couple of days that it was the end. My grandfather had lost his library before that, it had been stolen and sold. And they had been relegated to one room in their house for some time. So that night they turned on the gas.

They didn't have many possessions left, but there is.... Well, what happened was—this is skipping to years later—there was a law student at the University of Munich in the fifties, Heimlich von Bonhost [phonetic], who wrote a dissertation about Grandfather as a legal theorist. And that dissertation is my source for most of the facts that I know. And Helen and I, when we first got married, very soon after, 1953 or '4, I have to look it up, '54 probably, hitchhiked very slowly for six months from Naples to Oslo. And at that point we visited Heimlich von Bonhost, and he was a *very* nice young man, and he took us home to his house. And he said—or his father, who was all involved in this too, my memory is a little fuzzy on it—said, “Would you like to hear your grandparents' will?” Well, he had all this research material, whatever there was from my grandparents, he had copies of, or the originals. And, you know, the will was “a bracelet, a lamp.” There was not much. But anyway, this document, which exists, which I have, is in German, of course. The dissertation is, I think maybe the best source for learning about Grandfather. Anyway, 1941, in a really touching letter which I can find the translation of, maybe before we....

SR: That would be good.

PN: Okay. If you make a note of that, I will try to find that, because it's very moving, that last letter. And skipping *way* ahead, two years ago Helen and I were in Germany, and we have a very good friend there, Hans Reiss [phonetic], and Hans doesn't drive. I don't think he finished high school, but he's the single-handed author of an encyclopedia of children's book illustration in Germany—multi-volume affair. And Hans said, “I have a surprise for you. I found the little village

where your grandparents went.” My grandparents had written always....

“Nobody bothers us”—this is 1941—“Nobody bothers us, nobody seems concerned we’re Jews.” And Grandfather wrote one point in one letter, “I’m looking out at the hotel with the sign outside of it with the Hapsburg double eagle on the sign.” And [Hans] said, “I found somebody who knows how to drive.”

Hans doesn’t know how to drive. And we drove out through beautiful countryside to Austria. Munich, you can get anyplace from Munich very quickly. And there we were at the foot of the Alps—or not the foot. The Alps visible in the distance, in this bucolic little Austrian village. Indeed, that’s where the last letter had been written. I looked up, and there was the hotel with the Hapsburg double eagle sign, and we had our whipped cream and coffee there, and sat there and walked around.

SR: That must have been quite a moving experience.

PN: That was two years ago, which is also the first time I saw Grandfather and Grandmother’s—it isn’t a grave, it’s a memorial site—I doubt they’re buried there—in Munich, with their headstones. That was just two years ago. But anyway, Hans arranged for us to do all this, and it was very moving. I had just taken—one thing I had done on that trip was I had about fourteen letters of Grandfather’s, which are involved with Munich and legal history, which I was delivering to the Jewish museum in Munich. And the director of the Jewish museum, we were having coffee with him, and he said, “Oh, you’re going to ...” whatever this place in Austria was. “You should take me along there, because they speak a dialect you can’t even understand,” which is true, but I didn’t need to

understand it. But it's really sort of like Appalachia in Germany. It's quite different.

SR: That's quite a story. Actually, it's clear now, I can understand. When I was looking at the annotated version of *Charlotte's Web* and I saw that you dedicated it to your grandparents, I thought they must have been important to you.

PN: They are the most important in my life, really.

SR: Right. So that's good that you spoke about them, I think.

PN: Good.

SR: And I'm sure that your children and grandchildren will understand that, it's a good thing.

PN: I think so.

SR: Yeah. Now, so when you were here, did your parents tell you about your grandparents, or what had happened?

PN: We were vacationing in Oregon when my grandparents died. I remember my father getting the news. We were on the beach. I think he told me at the time, but I don't think the subject ever came up again. They never told me he committed suicide. I never knew that, I found that out when I was much older, rummaging in a room I shouldn't have been in. They never told me, I never knew that.

SR: To your knowledge, did any of the rest of the family go to any of the camps or anything? Or do you know?

PN: I do know. I think anybody reasonably close got out.

SR: That's good.

PN: There's an odd thing going on now. There was an event in Berkeley yesterday for Holocaust survivors. I never know, and I've talked with other people about this, it's never been defined, what's a Holocaust survivor? Do you have to have been in a camp?

SR: I was just asking someone the same thing. My daughter Wendy and I were talking about it, because I mentioned to you that we have a close friend who was part of the Kinder Transport, where she went from Vienna to be hidden in England, and her parents got her out while they were in Vienna. And Wendy said to me, "Was Ada a Holocaust survivor?" She was interviewed. She reunited with her father. Steven Spielberg interviewed them as part of the Holocaust, so I think maybe it's broader than having to have been in a camp.

PN: It *is* broader, but it's not....

SR: I'm not sure.

PN: Who's to say? I looked it up, because I wanted to know yesterday, did I have any business going there? And I really didn't know. I've written the historian Peter Gaye [phonetic]. He and I have briefly corresponded about that.

SR: At Columbia University's Oral History Collection, the woman who was director until recently, Jessica—I'm trying to remember her last name—she worked prior to that with Steven Spielberg at the very beginning, collecting the oral histories. She would know a lot about that. I can inquire a little bit. I will.

PN: I don't know how people feel.

SR: I think it's broadened lately.

PN: It *is* broader, but I should think that people who actually went to the camp would feel a little....

SR: It's ripples, you know.

PN: Yeah.

SR: Because, of course, you know, their relatives....

PN: But people suffer in different ways. My mother never had her head all together. But how much of that may be due to so many uprootings, I don't know. And my life is certainly very different from what it would have been.

SR: Oh, clearly! How marvelous that they had the foresight to come here.

PN: Yeah!

SR: And when you went to school *here*, okay, you came from Germany. What was it like learning English and going to school here?

PN: My grandmother brought me, and my parents were given an apartment in Mills College. They didn't want me around the first year, so they farmed me out quite literally. It was my luck. Down in Los Altos, down the peninsula, there was a wonderful, *wonderful* family, the Duvanek family, an old family. She was a Whitney from the Whitney days. And his father had been Frank Duvanek, a painter of considerable note in the middle of the 19th century, who painted a great deal in Munich, actually. And they were Quakers, and they had, I don't know, 15,000 acres, something like that, down the peninsula. In 1927 they bought that. San Jose was fruit trees in those days. And they took in waifs and strays, sort of people who needed taking care of. I guess at seven I was one of those. And they took me in. She had founded a school, the first progressive—in the whole Dewey

sense—the first progressive school on the West Coast, a peninsula school which is still going. She had children who were all older than I was. The youngest was a teenager, and the others were a little bit older. They had this extraordinary ranch, Hidden Villa Ranch, which still exists down there. When they died, they gave it to the county or to whoever. It's now an environmental experience camp for children. I don't know what it all is. I mean, we contribute to it annually, but it's a major enterprise, civically. There's now a Duvanek School in Los Altos, and Duvanek Street and all that. But in those days, they were younger, and they had horses and cows, and it was a wonderful place to be dumped.

SR: It sounds it!

PN: I had a friend, the foreman's son, Frank Pigot [phonetic], and we got in mischief together. We were seven and eight, and in those days radios had coils of endless invisible copper wire. It was so thin you couldn't see it. And we would string that all across every stairway in the house. And we were just terrible nuisances! And I got to ride. I rode old Peacock, a white horse. I guess I became a good rider, because I had riding adventures in later years, that were somewhat remarkable. It was just a wonderful, wonderful place to grow up. I went to the Peninsula School. And on Fridays, the shop teacher, Mr. Falgetter [phonetic], would load me in his car to take me to my parents, to see them for the weekend. I confess those were some of the most miserable afternoons of my life. I would stall, we would stall at the Dunbarton Bridge down here, which has great back-ups of salt, white salt, that's washed ashore. It's still there, it's just the same way. And I would stall and stall and want to go out and taste the salt, and fiddle, play in

the salt foam, so we wouldn't get to Mills College so early. Going home was not fun. But coming back was just.... And Helen still has collected these. When I arrived at the ranch, I was drawing a lot, and I would draw Nazi parades with swastikas and soldiers. And Josephine Duvanek's project was to turn these, as quickly as possible, into Indians and cowboys. So I think Helen has a collection of the evolution of these things.

SR: Oh! that would be very special to see and share.

PN: If you make a list, she could probably put her hand on that.

SR: Okay, so it's the collection of soldiers turning into cowboys and Indians. Okay. Then all this.... I'm going to get it, even though it means.... Fated book at the time. It was a book of animals, *Natural History of the Animal Kingdom*, and I brought that from Germany with me. This is the races of the world. But then the pictures, you see. And Josephine Duvanek would sit down with me and translate all the animals' names.

SR: Oh, so that helped you to learn English.

PN: That to help me learn English.

SR: I see. Oh, look at this!

PN: Two-hump Bactrian camel.

SR: Isn't that fantastic!

PN: She would look at this book with me.

SR: Oh, look at that! The drawings are wonderful.

PN: She didn't get to the birds.

SR: So she worked with you too?

PN: Yeah, she worked with me.

SR: To learn English.

PN: Yes, she did. She ran her school and she did whatever the many charitable acts that were going on at the ranch.

SR: What a special story. Has anyone written about *them*?

PN: She has an autobiography, *Life on Two Levels*, Josephine Duvanek, that's very literate and very good. I have it downstairs. At the same time, this was World War II. A major cause for her at the time, that consumed a great deal, that takes up a fair amount of the book, is the displaced Japanese in California. Those were a major cause for her at the time. One time I remember she'd do a crazy thing—it was out of a story book. Big dinner table with fifteen to twenty people. One time she tried, for peace in the world, to have some—I don't know how she got them there—some Japanese who should have been dislocated, and a couple of Marines, for a Thanksgiving dinner. That didn't work out.

SR: She was trying.

PN: Yeah. And we'd go to school in one of those big wood-paneled, yellow station wagons of the time.

SR: The "woodies," yeah.

PN: Wooden panels on it. Went to her school where I learned English. I *think*, I'm not sure, I may have been put back a grade because my English wasn't good enough, which doesn't make much sense, but I think I was. I may have later jumped grades, so it didn't make a lasting [impact].

SR: Yeah, because you entered college early, it sounds like.

PN: Yeah, I was a year ahead. I don't know how or why. I don't know when that happened.

SR: Do you remember liking to write when you were young?

PN: Well, after the year at the ranch, I moved in with my parents, and I was really alone. Let's see, I would have been seven at that point.

SR: You were seven when you came here, right?

PN: In 1936. I was seven, I guess. So I would have been eight. I was alone a good deal. My parents didn't have babysitters, so I was at home in the evening when they went out, which wasn't all *that* often, but when they went out, I was alone. The radio was very limited. I couldn't listen to more than whatever it was, half an hour or so. So I was drawing and writing, to answer your question, an awful lot. I was drawing a *great* deal. That's the main thing I did. And judging from some things that are still around, I guess I was writing stories—not compulsively, but I was. My father would make me memorize poems.

SR: I was just going to ask where the love of poetry started.

PN: Well, that was no love. He'd get very angry if I made a mistake. So that was terrifying, really. But I read a lot. I read an awful lot, because that's what I did. And I didn't have.... Let's see, where did I put it? (looks for book) Well, he did give me, this is maybe the first children's book I got, *Eight Little Indians*. And my father wrote here, "For remembering moving to Mills Hillcrest, September 1937." So he gave me *Eight Little Indians* at that point. And I loved that. I just loved that book. And I loved especially the Eskimo. And I didn't like the Navajo. But I didn't have many children's books. My father's library was huge.

And since it was art history, there were so many pictures. I remember in elementary school somebody would nudge me, wanting to see my father's art history books, because there were nude ladies in them. But that didn't really make an impact on me. I liked the books, and there were plenty of them. I went first, one year, to a public school in Oakland, and my parents weren't satisfied with that—I have no idea why. And so they put me in a Catholic school.

SR: How was that experience?

PN: In some ways.... Well, different sorts of experiences. I was too immature for certain things, specifically any kind of math or diagramming sentences, which was big. I just didn't get the point, I didn't get the logic. Totally it was a foreign language. And the girls were so good at diagramming sentences, and I didn't know what these things....

SR: I remember that.

PN: You know, these things, you have two subjects and two objects. Later in life, because prose is my subject in life, I devised my own way, just when I'm talking of sentences, that [unclear]. So it became my life. It still is. I was reading something the other night. I was reading essays from the 1950s about Darwin, and I was saying the essays from the 1950s, the sentences are so complex, so much more complex than they are or would be in an analogist journal today. I still see it. This is my life. I love it, seeing things syntactically and reading psychology into syntax. But in those days, I didn't get it. What I did get, which was, in retrospect I think quite wonderful, was I guess mainly in history. The history and the stories we got are still standing in good stead. In the annotated

Charlotte's Web, I think I mentioned one point, E.B. White writing a letter to Ursula Nordstrom, his editor, saying, "Have you ever heard of that story about King Alfred watching a spider, and he's so absorbed in watching the spider that he accidentally...." He's staying anonymously with a farm woman somewhere in a military campaign, and she says, "Watch the cakes so they don't burn." And he's so taken up with watching the spider that the cakes burn. Of course we learned that story in third grade. I remember that very well. I still remember we learned about St. Gregory—is it Gregory or Patrick?—coming to Ireland and seeing the children who were so blond. And somebody said, "These children are so blond because they're Angols." And St. Gregory said, "Not Angols, but angels." Life was full of such stories, which have stayed with me forever.

SR: They're wonderful stories.

PN: They're *great* stories, and that was really rich. The sisters were nasty. I remember very well trying to.... They weren't brutal, they were nasty. I tried very hard—I loved to draw—to draw a picture of my fifth-grade, fourth-grade teacher. I was trying very hard to draw her, and she came by and saw it and thought I was trying to be funny, and whopped me across the wrists with a ruler, which was a favorite mode of expression.

SR: I've heard such, yeah.

PN: Yeah. But it was not. It was not a major cruelty, it was just not a very pleasant place. As far as I know, my report cards.... My parents were very, very severe about my academic failures. As far as I know, there's a cloak room where we hung our coats, and my report cards, as far as I know, are still stuck under the

floorboards in that cloak room after all these years. They've never been exhumed.

SR: That's marvelous.

PN: They did promise me if I ever got straight "A's," a bicycle. I got straight "A's" the last semester. I never got the bicycle. I think they had forgotten. And one of our favorite modes of entertainment in that school was the woman whose property abutted the school yard, Mrs. Meek, had a big vacant lawn, and what we would do is, take each other from the back around the chest, and the person being held would breathe deeply three times and hold his breath, then you would squeeze, and they would pass out. And so this Mrs. Meek's lawn was littered in uniformed—we wore white shirts and black corduroys—dotted with little white-shirted children passed out. It wasn't much of an education, but a few good stories.

And from there I went to Frick Junior High School, which was a nothing junior high. And I went there, I think, for two years, because elementary went through sixth, I think.

SR: Right. Junior high used to be seventh, eighth, and ninth.

PN: Oh, I was, seventh, eighth, and ninth at Frick—a totally forgettable experience. My parents had some clothing for me from Germany. They were not impoverished. I've never understood—I've heard similar stories from other people—how the hell they got to America with so much stuff.

SR: I was wondering that. I was even wondering how you had these books, you know, getting out.

PN: Well, there aren't a lot. Almost everything I have, you've seen. There are five more books there, but that's it. But my parents came, I don't know.... But I've heard this story before. They had an 18th century Swedish dining room set—not crockery, but tables, chairs. I mean, we saw its counterpart in Stockholm decades later. Big armoires, because there weren't closets, of course. But these are *huge!*

SR: Oh, I love them, I've seen them.

PN: I don't know how they got all this stuff over here, but they did. But anyway, they had funny ideas about how I should dress, so I was picked on a lot through elementary school and especially junior high. I had to fight constantly. It was hard.

SR: That's awful.

PN: I was bullied. I was a good fighter, but it was awful hard. And I was afraid coming home. I came to Mills College, and a certain part you go through a pretty uninhabited part, and that was the locus, that's where we would meet for the fights. And I had to defend myself a good deal, and that was not fun. That was not fun at all.

SR: No. Did that persist through high school as well?

PN: No, for some reason I don't think so at all. I went on to Fremont High School in East Oakland, which is now a dissolute and dissipated place. But it was a big, normal public high school. There were two black people in it probably. One I remember, Toby Lawson, was a friend. And the [other] one I didn't know.

SR: What was the name? I'm sorry.

PN: Fremont. It's still there in East Oakland. There's a classmate of mine who became a very big-time radio announcer in the East Bay, Dave Mackelhatten [phonetic]. Big time. And he ran for class president. I wasn't popular in that way, but I had good friends, and I think I must have been a pretty nice guy. I mean, I had nice friends.

SR: That's clear.

PN: Well, it was fun, it was okay.

SR: Did you write for the newspaper or anything like that?

PN: No, I didn't. No, my parents were very strict about what I could take. I didn't have any choice. Nothing frivolous like that: no biology. I had to take whatever the other one was. No newspaper. They did allow me, if my grades were okay, I could go out for the track team, which I did and was not very good. And I was asked and was in High "Y," which I think is essentially, way down deep, is Christian, not Jewish. But the subject of Jewishness I don't think ever came up in any way that I can recall. I got terrible grades in algebra and all those things, and did well in.... It's right here, I saw it lying here. I guess Helen was looking at it. (walks away from microphone) In retrospect, very old-fashioned, but very good English teachers.

SR: Ah, that's what I was wondering.

PN: This kind of thing.

SR: What beautiful handwriting!

PN: I worked at it. Whatever this was, World Literature I.

SR: That's beautiful.

PN: I worked very hard. It's sort of funny to read. I guess as far as I can tell, the assignment was to.... William Tell's son here. We had a history of world literature, and I think we just had to paraphrase it.

SR: The Olympic Council. Yeah, that's right, the Greek, the Roman. Yeah.

PN: That kind of stuff. I did my best. I worked hard.

SR: That's very nice.

PN: And that's sort of typical of the education. It was pedestrian, but....

SR: It's wonderful that you have these things. This is so special. That's really great.

PN: I don't have many of them, but I have this.

SR: And the composition book that we had, [unclear] those books. Yeah, that's wonderful. So high school, any particular teachers you remember or liked?

PN: Well, my high point was an English class in which we read *Tale of Two Cities*. There was some kind of—I haven't read it in so long—but something was burning, or cataclysmic. The city is burning at the end or something, and I wrote for the term paper or whatever it was, a letter. And Don Ton [phonetic] or somebody had written, some character in the book, had written during the time the city was burning. I burnt the edges of the letter, and dropped a little blood on it.

SR: Oh, that's fun!

PN: And Mrs. Jordan showed it to the class, as what could be done with the assignment.

SR: Creative!

PN: That was sort of a high point. It was no great shakes, high school, but it was dutiful and nobody shirked their job, and I walked to school usually with friends. It was a long walk. It was probably, I would guess it was two miles to walk to school. And at first, probably in tenth grade I do remember my parents still had me wearing funny clothes. And I kept....

SR: When you say funny clothes, was it like the German shorts?

PN: At first it was shorts.

SR: What do they call it, *leder*....

PN: *Lederhosen*. Well, I didn't ever wear *lederhosen* because there's an awful lot of symbolic overlap with Nazism with that, so it was shorts, but not.... Symbols fly off everything, says Emerson. But in high school, I would cross an old field behind the houses in [unclear] vacant lots, maybe a quarter mile. And then there was a bridge, and under the bridge I kept a suit of normal clothes, my Levis and a normal sweater. And I would change on the way.

SR: That's fascinating. It *is*. I can really understand that. I mean, kids want to be like each other. You want to be part of your peer group or whatever.

PN: Yeah. So I would change on days that I found that necessary—not every day.

(pause) I had girls....

SR: I was going to ask you about that. Girlfriends?

PN: I graduated when I was sixteen, and I'd periodically fall in love, just so my stomach would drop. I would just.... It would just rip me up. But I was too shy. Ann Cochran just tore my heart out. But I would sit at the opposite [unclear], I couldn't sit near her. I don't think I really.... I vaguely remember in twelfth

grade, somebody was.... I know what! Because between eleventh and twelfth grade I'd worked in the summer camp in the Sierra, and I had fallen for a girl named Joan Mallory, who was a *significant* swimmer. She was rated in ... wherever people are rated. I was a good swimmer too. She really impressed me. And there was a match-making young lady in twelfth grade who kept bringing me news about Joan, but that didn't really go anywhere. I think I tried to take her out—I did, one evening in the summer camp, and her father, a great big scary guy said to me, "Be sure she's home at nine o'clock, because she's in training." But otherwise, in high school I was too shy. And I didn't go to the senior dance. We had a counselor—I never saw her in my life before or after—but once before the senior ball she wanted me to, she called me in and asked me if I would take somebody or other to the senior ball, and that girl was just the biggest, slobbiest girl in the class. I didn't go. I went to before-school classes in how to dance, to get ready for it. Mrs. Tweedy had classes, but then when the chips were down, I never went.

But I had good friends that I walked to school with. There were other faculty kids. Faculty lived in a little section at Mills College. All the time I was there, there were two German refugee children, Mike and—well, their names were Wolfgang and Rheiner. And Wolfgang later became Mike, and Rheiner became Frank. They changed their names. But one day Rheiner, who was really my better friend—they were both good friends—came *running* over to our house, just joyous! He had found out that morning, he said, "We're enemy aliens!" He was *so thrilled!* We were citizens, but his father was a German professor, and he

collected fish and guppies. There's the Russian River up here about an hour, and he could no longer go to get his baby guppy food, his shrimp or whatever they were, to the Russian River, which was his source, because an enemy alien can only go ten miles from their house. So even though he was an air raid warden, still he couldn't. My father was an air raid warden too.

SR: Fascinating.

PN: Darius Miel [phonetic] was the composition professor. He's a significant composer in America. They lived next door, and his son Daniel was perhaps my closest friend. And Daniel and I played all the time, and there's many stories, but they'd be tedious, about Daniel. Except we visited Daniel, what, two years ago, Helen?

HELEN NEUMEYER: Yes.

SR: Oh, that's wonderful.

PN: He's a very, *very* successful painter, lives in Paris, and has studios in Paris and Florence. Very, very nice. So we've visited him several times since then.

HN: Three times.

PN: Three times, okay.

SR: Then how did you decide to go to Berkeley for college?

PN: Drift! I wanted—it was 1946, and anybody who was anybody in my class, joined the Marines.

SR: That was *it*?

PN: That was absolutely what you did. I wanted *so* badly to do that. I was so young, naïve, untutored, and my parents said, “No, you're going to college.” They said,

“We’ve got it all fixed up for you. We found a family you can live with. You can work for your room and board there, and you can join in ROTC” which pays a certain amount of money, I forgot what. And that’s what I did. So I was sixteen, I worked in the Sierra, which I did most summers, had a *wonderful* time. The summers run into each other, I can’t discriminate. But they were wonderful for.... It was so beautiful. I was so moved by the beauty of the Sierra. That’s still an idea important to me now, because I’m not, and I’m wondering what happened. I was so shaken by the beauty of it all when I was very young. That happened every summer. I loved being there. Also, there was usually a romance every summer. It was sort of an isolated circumstance in the mountains. I was young and not as sagging in those days, and swam very well. Those were good summers, they were great.

SR: How about the winters? What was school like in college?

PN: Winters I worked terribly hard. I worked for my room and board, for one year with the Sears family. He was a retired professor of philosophy from Ohio Wesleyan. And she was a physician sort of specializing in sex education. So they had good books to read too. I mean, I read.... Somebody mentioned one of those books in something I heard on PBS the other day, because it was culturally such an interesting point in 19-whatever it was, 1940. Van Weiden [phonetic] or somebody like that, who was read by everybody in those years.

SR: Was it Vandeveld? [phonetic]

PN: Vandeveld.

SR: Vandeveld. I remember my parents had that.

PN: Okay, yeah. The house was full of such things, and Larry Sears was a patient guy. He was hurting. I don't know what it was, arthritis or whatever. He was in some pain, which would make him a little dour sometimes. But I took care of their children and washed their floors and washed their windows and worked hard for my room and board, and they were good to me. They were very nice.

SR: And what about your studies in school?

PN: And I studied. I was *much* too young. I was taking NROTC. I was having a hell of a time with anything that had math in it, navigation, things like that. For some reason I was popular. I was wooed by fraternities. I had no *notion* of going anywhere near a fraternity. I didn't have money for that kind of thing, I was busy studying. But the NROTC folk got very paternal about me, especially since I had no natural talent to do anything military. There was one Marine captain whose job was to recruit whoever couldn't do anything, for the Marines. And he had his eyes on me, and he would get me weekends, and I would fly with—veterans would come back and during their military tour of duty they'd get assigned to the university, and they'd have the weekends to do their flying hours. So I could go up with them on weekends in their wonderful little whatever those planes were, two people in the plane. We'd buzz around the Bay Area. I did a fair amount of that. I felt I had people who cared about me.

SR: That's wonderful.

PN: And that was nice. And I had an *awful* time in my courses. Everybody took Geology 1, because it was the cinch course, and I got a "D" in it. I just didn't understand. These things interest me now. Decades later they became of *great*

interest. But they passed me by. But sometime in that first year, I took freshman English. I wrote my heart out. I still have that essay. It pains me to look at it. I wrote my heart out on an essay about why I didn't want to be in NROTC, why I disliked it so intensely. And I got a "C" minus on the essay. That broke me up. I was really saying what was deepest. I didn't even know, when I saw that a few months ago, that I felt so pained by the experience. But I did, and I tried to write that. I just had a big, blatant "C" minus and question marks in the margin. So that was no good.

SR: That's cutting. That's hurtful.

PN: Then I took my first literature course, and the teacher was not a—he was perfectly nice, but not significantly—sort of a dainty little man. This was a turning point in my life. We read in that class Byron's poems, and Lauren Stern's *Tristom Shandy* [both phonetic spellings]. Those are the main things I remember. And I didn't know such things existed in the world. And I have it right here, not the same edition. At a certain point, *Tristom Shandy* is a mid 18th century novel. It's about 1750, and the main character becomes unconscious, gets knocked out at a certain point. And this is the page. And I thought I'd never seen anything that funny in my life! It just bowled me over. You can make somebody unconscious by having a blank page. Then there's another long page. The whole book is a joke, sort of a complicated 18th-century joke, but it gets into the issue of—it's in the form of an autobiography of prenatal baptism, whether it is necessary according to canon law, whether it is valid if you baptize a child interuterinally or whatever. And it's all made up. And there's these learned footnotes from fake sources arguing this

case [unclear]. I was in stitches! I knew what was going on in the book, and I got it, and it was just so damned funny! And I didn't know such a world existed, that you could be funny and serious in a novel, and could take such liberties. It's on the way to James Joyce. And then we read Byron, little romantic poems, and they're sort of corny. And those little romantic poems were *exactly* where I was at that point. He spoke to my loneliness. I was *very* alone in the world, living with the Sears then—or maybe I was on my own. When I left the Sears, I don't know, I've lived all over Berkeley. I went from one place to another, and worked at one job after another. In 1949 I got.... Whenever I could, I played club football. A fraternity wanted me, and I played with [them]. I was four inches taller then, but I was always little. I played with heart, and I went out for the swimming team and worked very hard on that. I was never terribly good, but I worked hard at it. So I was not that big, and I got hurt pretty badly and had a back operation when I was nineteen—1949. I guess I was nineteen. Yeah, I think I was nineteen. And I don't remember the details of this very well, because I've had so many back operations since, and that was only the first. I don't remember, I think my parents saw to it that they were out of the country for that occasion. I had my back fused at that point. I've had it fused many times since, and my back is metal rods now. But I was nineteen then, and I was on my own, my parents were not around.

SR: That's hard, very hard.

PN: I know what! I had a friend, Bud Walrath [phonetic], and he lived in East Oakland. He was a friend since high school, and we were roommates, I guess, at

that point. I lived in his downstairs room when I was recovering. I think my parents were in South America, I'm not sure. So then I don't have the dates right on this, but from there on, the future is spotted with back operations. And everything else that has happened, sort of has woven around those times.

SR: During those times when you were recuperating, did you do a lot of reading?

PN: Yeah, I did.

SR: That's what I would think.

PN: Yes, I did a lot of reading. And in between, as soon as I could, I would be swimming or hiking, being as vigorous as I could—I always was. Still, I try to walk twenty miles a week.

SR: Wow. That's terrific.

PN: Tilden Park [phonetic] is one block away. I have to, otherwise everything will crumble.

SR: So you went to college at sixteen, and then you had this operation at nineteen. There are a lot of things that are pretty early, and that you had to handle all by yourself.

PN: Absolutely.

SR: Wow.

PN: Absolutely. And I got bad grades. I'm not sure, retrospectively, I don't know what was wrong. But I didn't get it. There's an English course you take in your first junior semester, which is Introduction to Criticism, and that sort of shows you whether you can be an English major or not. And I was in that class, and it just passed me by. And the teachers were not great. Occasionally I would run

into wonderful reading. The reading I liked. The teachers, some were bad, some were not. It was run of the mill. I did poorly in all other classes, categorically Philosophy was awful. But those were, in retrospect, pretty bad teachers. They were all very large lecture halls.

SR: Yeah, very different.

PN: We had sections, and sometimes the sections were okay. But what I really liked, I liked my Introduction to Zoology class, because I'd never had anything like that. I loved that. Then at a certain point, it must have been about my senior year, I suddenly got it! And I was on probation for, I think, three years I was on academic probation. If I got one more "C," I'd be out. And I took German. It was against the law to take your own language. I took German 1 and spoke it with an American accent all semester long, got an "A," and tutored a pretty girl, and I got off probation, and that semester I got it with English. And from there on, I was never below an "A." I understood how the teacher's mind worked. It's so simple, really. If Willard Farnham, a great Shakespearian, in every lecture of his, he was emphasizing the role of women in Shakespeare's plays, that's obviously what the final question would be. It couldn't be anything else!

SR: I understand that well. Yeah.

PN: So from then on, it was just a breeze. I've told my students for years—and it is half true, I think—if they ask, "Why English?" or "Should I be an English major?" It is really sort of perversely true, it's the only major I could think of for which you didn't have to know anything. If you were a sensitive, warm human being that could understand.... No math. I wanted to go into forestry: it seemed

so virile, and it was outdoors, and it was in the Sierra. I really wanted that. Then they have to take something called Commensuration.

SR: What's that?!

PN: Which is planning how many board feet there are. And I couldn't do that. And I tried anthropology.

SR: What kind of anthropology?

PN: Ah! I loved physical anthropology. I had a good course with somebody named McCowen. He was interesting. He told us, as an anthropological fact, where the most beautiful women in the world were. They were in southwest China. [unclear] Kirkistan, around in there. One sentence I'll never forget. He was talking about skin, and he was telling us—there was a cliché for some soap in those days, “the skin you love to touch.”

SR: I remember that.

PN: And he would tell us, “The skin you love to touch is really....” He was a very cadaverous man. He said, “The skin you love to touch is really dead, horny, scaly matter.” There was something about that, that I just thought was so whimsical. I don't know, it got to me. It wasn't English, and I did go on a dig out to Drake Spay [phonetic] here, where one of Drake's ships went aground, and there is Ming or Tang Dynasty china buried in a big dig out here. And we went out to excavate that. And that was fun. And there was one very pretty girl. And so one year of anthropology. But then another teacher would make us memorize the Indian tribes in California, and that got so tedious.

SR: Yeah, that's unfortunate.

PN: I had a man named Rowe, who was very famous, for Peruvian Pottery. But I didn't get that interested in Peruvian pottery.

SR: But yet you went on for your master's?

PN: I went on.... It was really.... I had no other idea what to do. I had gone on one adventure, I guess, the end of my first NROTC year. We went on a battleship cruise through parts of the Pacific and Hawaii and so forth. [unclear] my military. But then I just drifted into the M.A. That's about the time Helen and I met.

Well, for the master's, it's not a minor note that I met Helen. We got married within six months of the meeting, I think.

SR: How did you meet?

PN: My parents, I didn't visit them very often. I very rarely came to Mills. But one time I did, and they had promised if I ever came home there would be no girl—Mills is a girls' college—there would be no girl around, because I had enough to do at Berkeley, and life was complex enough. This time, without their intending to, they screwed up, and Helen and her roommate were in my father's study, talking. And I came home, and I guess we looked at each other across a not very crowded room, and I guess Helen—correct me, Helen, if I misremember this—but Helen sort of got a bee in her bonnet and wanted to invite.... Helen really tells the story better than I do. She wanted to invite me very quickly to something or other. She was living with her roommate in a house just off campus. And they devised a garden party, so I was invited to dig up weeds very shortly thereafter. And I came. There were three girls: Helen's roommate, and Helen, and a girl named Kay Vinn [phonetic], and they were all very attractive, but Helen was

really something special. But it was a little fuzzy in my mind who was who, and who I was.... Kay Vinn was very interesting too. And I had a very steady girlfriend in Berkeley. I don't know what.... Helen, what was the next step? Things developed pretty fast, and I had to tell Sue, who was absolutely a sweet, lovely woman/girl....

HN: Had knitted you [unclear].

PN: Had knitted me so many sweaters and socks. I had to tell her it was all over. It was hard. It was hard. And then Helen and I had ... dated was the word at the time ... a good deal. Went to beaches and other things that didn't take much money. And saw ... what's that Japanese movie where you see everything from every person's perspective?

SR: Is that "Rashamon?" [phonetic]

PN: "Rashamon," yeah. That was our big movie.

SR: I love that concept.

PN: Well, it's very much like what you were saying.

SR: Yes.

PN: We told my parents, and that was fine. Helen was a *very*, very good student at Mills. They liked her. And that must have been in spring. I wrote her quite a few poems, quite a lot. Much of our life was sort of suffused with silver-gray. I was interested in that concept in Browning's poems, and it struck me that in our own life there were so many foggy San Francisco beaches, and Helen had a beautiful, beautiful dress—she may still have it—with silver stripes on sort of a white satiny background. It was so beautiful, and she was so beautiful in it. So I wrote poems

about that silver-gray business. We fell deeply in love, and that Christmas I went to Glencoe to Helen's family home, on Lake Michigan, just north of Chicago. And her parents were very, very welcoming and warm. And she had a little brother who's fifteen years younger, I think, and for whom I wrote stories at the time. He still remembers these stories. He lives in San Jose now. He still remembers those stories. I found an old notebook—I was getting ready for this—somewhere I had written something or other that we had seen somewhere. "It would make a great story for Tommy." So I was writing for Tommy at the time. And she had a big brother.... No! Everybody's younger than Helen. A brother Jack and a sister Natalie, and they were just all so nice to me. I was really—I'd been totally on my own without any financial support, so I had my Levis and a couple of tee shirts. I think we were just both starting graduate school, and had exams ahead of us. After the wedding—we got married a few days after Christmas—we were put on a train, came back to the Bay Area and to the same house. And a couple of nights after, that house caught fire. It didn't burn down. It burnt badly, and we slept with the strong stench of burnt wood. Helen got her master's with dispatch, quickly and honorably; and I got one in English here, but there are two kinds of M.A.'s: one, you're allowed to go on for a Ph.D., and the other one is a terminal M.A. And I had to take it over again to go on. I just didn't understand at the time. It was like algebra, literary criticism. I loved the books, I loved them, but I didn't know how to talk about books professionally. I just didn't get it. So I took it again, a semester later. I think, from what I see now, my impression is exams were hard at Berkeley. I think they were. I couldn't pass

them now. They were tough! I worked very hard. There were suicides in graduate school—plural.

SR: That's unfortunate.

PN: People were left on their own, really. Anyway, to get past that, after the M.A., I taught. Correct me if I'm wrong. Oh! I know what we did. Then, right after we got our degrees, we saved money like mad for about a year or two, and then we went to Europe. I'd always wanted to go to Europe, I'd never been there.¹ And we were living down here on McGee Street, and I don't think we had a car. We got places on bicycles, and really saved every penny. We would say, "Let's cut a caper tonight," and we would put a caper on the table with a knife, and cut the caper in two.

We took a boat to Naples. I won't go into this, because the stories are too many and too wonderful. But we got on a boat to Naples and stayed in a youth hostel there the first night, and then over the next five or six months, we hitchhiked. (aside to Helen) Five months? Over the next five months, we hitchhiked to Oslo, slowly. We'd occasionally go by bicycle; occasionally we'd stay with relatives. For the first time, I visited our home in Munich. When we first got to Munich—this is a little bit interesting—when we first got to Munich, we were hitchhiking and we got picked up by a couple of Nazis who had been working in concentration camps before. And they started talking about the Jews, and we were in the car, and my response—we were twenty-five then, weren't we, Helen? My response was to get sick. I said, "Let's get out of here." And we slowed down, Helen and I rolled out of the car, into a ditch by the side of the

¹ [since leaving as a child (Tr.)]

road. I said, "Let's just stay down, keep down." They were agreeable people, they would have turned around and seen probably what was up. I don't remember whether they did or not, but we got out of there. I was sick, and we got out of Germany as fast as we could.

SR: I can understand that.

PN: We did that. We didn't go back for many, many years. Ended up we stayed a little bit in a relative's empty house in England, and went to a Royal Shakespeare play, went to Stratford. We had a wonderful time! We ended up in Oslo. Well, "wonderful time," we were very young. We were under a fair amount of travel stress. We probably argued a fair amount, I would guess. It was not an always easy trip, but we did our best, and we were still just getting to know each other.

Come fall....

SR: Ah, this is a picture.

PN: That's in Switzerland.

SR: What a handsome couple! Wow, that's lovely. That's lovely.

PN: Those were great days. Yeah, that's a lovely picture. Yeah, that was a wonderful day.

SR: Beautiful.

PN: We were sitting in a restaurant in Oslo.... We had visited several relatives, including an uncle in Stockholm who was a patent attorney, very nice man. And it seemed like it was time to go to school. And our plan was, I was going to go to Majorca and write a novel. We had a suitcase, I'm not sure if it had been sent to Majorca. Helen says yes. It was already on its way to Majorca, and we were

going to go there, and I was going to write my novel—at twenty-five. And sitting in a restaurant in Oslo, I realized I didn't have anything to say. And it was time to go to school. And we had met such nice relatives. I said, "Why don't I go to law school?" This was August, I think. I applied to Bolt, the law school here, and they said yes, and I went. We came home, and I went to law school for a year, and was sort of a steady "C" student. I was not flunking out. We had friends, including a friend of ours still—not a boyfriend, but somebody who had dated Helen before I had ever met her, who was a, what do you call it?

HN: Estate.

PN: Estate planning lawyer. We *still* know him. And he's the most somber, sober, black-vest-wearing [unclear]. And his life looked so tedious, and it looked so awful! And I thought and thought about it, and I was into my third semester, and I just didn't think that was what I wanted to do in life. I'm sure I was wrong. In law school today there's so many more possibilities, and there's public service. And I didn't see that.

SR: Yeah, what you saw....

PN: And Bolt wasn't like that then, Bolt Law School—it's not what I saw, anyway. My good friends in law school were sort of free-wheeling types—one of them, one of the brightest people I've ever met, flunked the California Bar and went into the consular service, and had a full career in the State Department. The other I think is the father of the mayor of San Francisco, Newsome, who became a judge. But it wasn't for me, so I went back to English, and did several things. I'm not sure of the timing in this. I got a teaching credential, because that was like an

insurance policy. We went to Santa Rosa, and Helen taught in a third grade, Mark West, which was a cow pasture then—literally! cows on the playground! And I taught in the junior high. I taught math and English in seventh grade, I think. Santa Rosa is an hour north of here, and in 1955, if that's when it was, it was *very*, very pretty, and lots of fishing, which I like to do. And nice people. At one point Helen said to me, "You're too young to retire." I was envisioning a career in Sebastopol or someplace up there in the woods, with my friends. She was right, so it was back to Berkeley to begin on a Ph.D.

Let's see, about then we must have had our first—yeah! because you were pregnant up in Santa Rosa. So Zack, our first child, was born. I have the year here. Zack, July '58. We lived in the Montclair Hills [Volpin?] which was very pretty. We had geese. And Helen would hang out the diapers to dry, and the geese would peck at her legs. And I fixed up—there were rafters, sort of a ceiling like this in the little cottage we rented, and I would hang up Zack's basket by my table and give him a push and he'd swing back and forth. Helen's mother came out to help for a while. Sweet lady. I drove a Better Made Salad truck. I had a route from, I don't know, Santa Rosa down to Fremont or someplace down the peninsula. I was delivering salads to stores. I was not terribly good at it. The driving was okay, but figuring the dates due, and pulling out the new ones and putting in—I got confused. I wasn't great at that. But it was a wonderful job to have, it was nice. I worked hard at that, I guess all summer while Zack had just been born.

Then, let's see, I got my Education stuff. That was not serious, that was just courses you had to take that were pretty silly.

SR: What about the other things that you learned in the doctoral program?

PN: The doctoral program? Again, it was a little bit like the undergraduate: I didn't have any *really* marvelous teachers or mentors. They were okay, and I liked them, but it was really the material. I loved it, I loved it. I had a good man, Willard Farnham, for Shakespeare, who was of some distinction. I had him again—I guess a seminar as soon as I came back from law school. That was my first seminar. And I'd just been to law school, and typical of law school and—this connects to Willard Farnham—my ineptitude and inaptness for law was.... I'd essentially spent my life, I think—a good part of my thinking life—in libraries. And in the course in contracts in law school, we went through a case, and I could figure it out. It was complex, but I could make sense of it, I could handle it. And there was somebody in the class who had been a CPA in real life, and went back to law school. After we had all solved the case, he raised his hand and he said, "Yeah, but how are you going to collect?" And that just.... It was the real world coming into my library. I'd never.... My father was so impractical. I'd never been in that world before. That's always been symbolic to me. So that when I went back to that first Shakespeare seminar the next semester, Mr. Huck, a student in the seminar, and Willard Farnham were arguing whether in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" a fairy could actually fit into a nutshell. That sort of bowled me over! I find it in my journal, my amazement at that first conversation out of law school. And I had a wonderful man named—he

was dry as dust, but his material and his books were so interesting, about millennial thought in the 18th century. Things came together for me. I had a good Victorian poetry course—or at least the material was so good. I enjoyed the stories, I enjoyed the poems.

I had a course that was very important for me, very important. It almost turned my whole direction, with Mannengrube [phonetic] and Potter in 17th century. He was dry as dust, but he was a very decent, nice man. His course was 17th century poetry. I read John Dunn [phonetic] for the first time. And again, I was bowled over. A poem beginning, “For God’s sake, hold your tongue and let me love!” That was so much where I was emotionally myself. His most famous poem is about a flea. It’s called “A Flea,” and the poem is about so long, five inches long. Dunn was a lawyer before he became *the* deacon or whatever it is, of St. Paul’s. He was the most famous preacher of his time. He had been a rake when he was young, lots of very nice love poems. And this flea poem is an argument, a very legal argument that we’ve got to have sex, because this flea has bitten me, and it’s got my blood in it. Now the flea has bitten you, and so our blood is already mingled in this flea, so what’s holding you back? Let’s go! And it’s beautifully written, and it’s so funny, again. It was emotionally so vivid and true.

SR: As I’m hearing you, again, it’s that you found, as you said, where you were, something that touched you emotionally for where you were in life, and also amusing.

PN: Yeah, that’s true.

SR: It seems like that's what grabbed you.

PN: Yeah. Or quite the other side, a sermon of Dunn's in the 17th century, in 17th century prose, sentences go on forever and ever. And one sermon ends.... He's quite holy and contrite in his later years, and the sermon ends—I wish I knew it by heart, but I don't—but it goes about like this, the ending. It's saying essentially, “However bad a sinner I am, God is not going to desert me.” And the rhythm of it is that that God who did *this* good thing for us, that that God who did *that* good thing, that that God who....” It goes on with “that God” for a paragraph, “that he should finally cast me out, throw me into the dark and forget me, *that* is an impossibility!” But it sounds like great organ music, a great organ concert. That 17th century just really got to me. And poor little Sue had to take the course with me, and was knitting away at my sweaters. Life was good. No, that wasn't....

SR: Now you're in graduate school.

PN: That's in graduate school. So Sue was in English 100, that was the year before. Okay. So that was that. Then there was a man named James Klein [phonetic], who taught Elizabethan literature. He was not—this being Berkeley, he had not written all that much, he had written very little, so he became a dean later—and so was not held in that high esteem [unclear]. He was probably in his early sixties, and he got so emotional about the poetry he was talking about. It was a specific poem, I remember the poem, “Spencer's Epithalamion,” [phonetic] which is a wedding poem. And he got so teary about it, and so emotional, that it just really got to me, that this man could become so.... It moved me so much. And later

on—I'm not sure I'm sequential with any of this—but later on, he was a big factor in my thinking.

SR: This is James Klein?

PN: Jim Klein. And he later became a dean, and occasionally I ran into bureaucratic obstacles here and there—nothing ever important. But I'd write a note to Dean Klein about something, and the answer, without any fuss. I didn't know the man—these classes were fifty people, probably—he always granted everything, never any fuss about anything. And some years ago, I'm guessing four or five years later, I was at Harvard, and teaching on my first big job. I thought about this, and I wrote Jim Klein a letter telling him how much he meant to me at the time, saying about what I said here. And about five years later I got a letter from Jim Hart [phonetic]. I guess he was provost or something like that. He was an English professor, the compiler of *Oxford History of American Literature*, very important man in that field. And he had risen in the ranks here. He was director of the Bancroft Library, which is the manuscript collection here. I got a letter from him at Harvard saying, "Jim Klein died, and we were going through his papers and we found your letter. It must have meant a lot to him. We'd like to read it at his memorial service." So that was the end of the Jim Klein story. I'm so glad [unclear].

SR: Yes. Now, as you're talking ... when you were doing the doctorate, did you do a dissertation on a particular topic?

PN: Yup! Can I just interject one thing, because it's sort of funny.

SR: Of course!

PN: Before the dissertation, you have to take a prose seminar, sort of testing you how you'll do if you ever do a dissertation. I took one with a man named McKenzie—it's not important. And we wrote papers for him on a George Elliott novel called *Daniel Duranda* [phonetic]. There was one woman—this is fairly early in the graduate experience—there was one woman that read her paper, and it was so dazzling, it was so brilliant, that I'm not sure whether I actually did, or just thought of dropping out of graduate school. It was so out of my league. Well, that was Patricia Myers Spack, who's very famous now in English circles. She's chairwoman probably, if she's still active, at University of Virginia, I think. And she's written books and books: one book on gossip, one book on letters. Brilliant! She's a feminist critic, and has written wonderfully on Jane Austen. She's gone on in that vein. I picked the right one to be in awe of!

SR: Yes!

PN: So that was Patricia Myers Spack. But for the dissertation, people have a hard time finding them. It's not like biochemistry or something. They're not just popping out at you. So I took a course from a man named Ian Watt, in which you're to find a seminar, something in the modern novel probably—that was his field. He had written a *big* book on the 18th century novel. He was an Englishman. He had been one of the men who had actually built the bridge on the River Kwai. He had been a British prisoner of war there. He had dirty handkerchiefs stuck up his sleeve in the British fashion—filthy habit! And he was very nice to me, and he invited me to take his course, to help me out. One thing I found at Berkeley, it wasn't great teaching because people were so set on

their scholarship—people were awfully kind to me. People went out of their way, I think, to be kind to me.

SR: That's very nice.

PN: I was a T.A., and I was always assigned visitors or people that they wanted to be, for some reason, do something nice for. I was put with such people, so I met some nice people. I must have been adaptable, friendly, helpful. I tried to be nice. I was terribly normal. I was not brilliant, by any means. But I was enthusiastic and nice probably. And so I did work as a T.A., which meant you taught about a quarter of the course yourself, and you read the papers—you read 90% of the papers, or whatever, and taught about a quarter. So I got assigned nice people. One of them—I never took a course, but we became friends then afterwards—was Jonas Barish [phonetic], who died here a while back. Seventeenth century. He gave me a book, an 18th century book, still on the shelf. So these people became friends sometimes.

Anyway, Ian Watt, from England: I was in his course and I was at a loss for a dissertation. He had awfully brilliant people. What's the name of the fellow down here who writes about Freud, writes for *The New York Review*? I forget his name. Fred Cruz! Fred Cruz came in to lecture, brilliant young professor, just arrived from Yale. He was not encouraging to me. He said, "Why don't you write about George McDonald? He sounds like your kind of thing." Well, I read George McDonald, and George McDonald is *so* tedious. He's one of Maurice Sendak's favorite authors. He's about 1880. He was instrumental in the founding of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, because he wrote a book

about—as did Mrs. Soule [phonetic]—about being kind to cab horses. That kind of stuff was of interest to Dickens too. George McDonald was a Scotsman, a friend of Lewis Carroll. You can sort of get buried in the novels, but what in the world would you say? They're sort of “churchy” too. I couldn't....

And then I don't remember how it happened exactly, but somewhere the suggestion was, “Since you know German, why don't you do something with Thomas Mann?” And that led me to a man named Howard Hugo here, who was a professor from Harvard. A young man, he'd been in battle in World War II in something like PT boats. He was a nice young man, had not written much, and told endless stories, and was very nice to me, we became friends. And Helen and I were invited to their place in Martha's Vineyard, and we spent time with him. And I got him, because he was fluent in German. And so what could I do? And I thought and thought, I came up—I'm not sure exactly how it developed—the title of the dissertation is “The Modern German Novel in England: with special attention to Thomas Mann and Kafka.” I was still not very—I'm not yet—very good at the literary critical concepts of handling [other?]. I'm not facile with that. So this was as a, relatively speaking, a pretty objective thing to do. You could lay it out, you could read all the criticism of Mann in England that ever happened; and all the Kafka. And you could read all of Mann and Kafka, see what they ever said about England, so you could get it going both ways. I don't know whether Howard ever read the whole thing or not, but it was finished, and it was successful, and exotic, and for the English Department it was exotic.

SR: Did it take a long time to do?

PN: Well I did other things: I taught high school in Orinda. I taught seventh grade. It may have been the most interesting and best teaching I've ever done in my life. It was great. The schools were not much control. I was smart and on my way, and they left me alone.

SR: That's great!

PN: And do with the kids what you want.

SR: Oh how wonderful!

PN: I had boxes of books delivered to the class, and I would tell them about what Shakespeare play—give them a couple of choices. And we did, in that seventh grade, we read “King Lear.” And I brought in a variorum edition. A variorum edition is this thick for each play, and there's this much text, and then every critic's comments underneath. And those seventh graders wanted to know what did Toleridge [phonetic] think of that? And what did Hazlitt say about that? They'd get into arguments. Helen and I did this, actually, with our own children at Harvard. We lived in Medford, and we took a vacation on St. Johns. We were told we can't take the children out of school, and I promised they'd get schooling with us. And we read “Midsummer Night's Dream” then. The children were little, and we read every line. And then we saw the Peter Brooks production when we came back to New York. And our children could anticipate where the laughs were, and they knew that play better than people around them.

So I did that with the seventh graders with “King Lear,” which is a simple story, a king with three daughters—two bad and one good. And the play is so great because it works on so many levels. I got a phone call, was it two years ago,

Helen? Maybe about two years ago, from somebody who said, “You don’t remember me. I’m a surgeon in New York, and I was in your seventh-grade class, and I just want you to know that....” I got a call about that!

SR: That’s wonderful!

PN: That makes it worth a lot!

SR: Absolutely! Being an educator was clearly a big part of what your calling is.

PN: I guess. I’ve had very mixed luck with students. In truth, I’ve had an awful lot of run-of-the-mill students who didn’t like me. I guess I was pretty hard, too. I’ve had extraordinary luck and life-long friends with *some* students. It’s always been that way for me. A very close friend, one died a year ago. He was a lawyer in San Diego. He died on a hike in the Sierra—forty-five.

But the dissertation, there’s a little more story to the dissertation. This is it. Because in the course of it, it’s really a little bit fraudulent, because there’s lots of it I didn’t write, because I wrote to anybody I could think of.... Where the heck is it? Here! ... who either might have had dealings with Thomas Mann or with Kafka. And many people answered, like Somerset Maugham, or Angus Wilson, or William Golding of *Lord of the Flies* fame. Or Thomas Mann’s secretary, Ida Hertz. Or ... well, Erika Mann, Thomas Mann’s daughter, pages and pages of answers to my questions. I guess I was pretty good at asking questions, because they wrote long answers. And these answers all became part of the dissertation. We’ve carried them around with us forever. About two years ago I got the idea, they shouldn’t die in *my* hands, so I asked Berkeley if they wanted the letters. Christopher Isherwood and people like that. Of course they’re

delighted. And so I had them appraised, and we got a nifty tax write-off and donated them to the Bancroft Library here.

SR: Terrific!

PN: And I thought—San Diego State is getting virtually everything, but this is so unrelated to San Diego State that they belong [unclear].

SR: I know San Diego State is very appreciative of the more you can do. They really are excited about it.

PN: Well good! I want to ask you your views and help on that.

SR: Okay!

PN: Because we're at that point in life where we're trying to lighten.

SR: It's very exciting, because you made such an *incredible* contribution to San Diego State, they want to highlight *you*, so that's good.

Okay, so you're doing the dissertation, and you already have a family growing.

PN: Three children. We lived two blocks from here in a wonderful little house, a little cottage we rented.

SR: And how in the world did you decide to go to Harvard? What happened to make that happen?

PN: (laughs) This was before the days of affirmative action, and there were strange ways of getting jobs. And as I said, people were good to me, people looked out. People did look out for me, and nice times. The grandson of the painter Renoir was teaching in the English Department here. He said, "Peter, would you like to go to Harvard?" And I said, "Well, that sounds all right." Oh! a little note before

that. I had been teaching school, as I say, also to make money, and the Education Department needed somebody in a real field to be a sort of a supervisor of teachers out in the classroom occasionally. So I got *that* job, which was a nicely—that paid well for those days. And so I worked for them as a supervisor in the field, while I was a T.A. in English, and had all these jobs. Somehow I was then associated with the schools and teacher training and things like that, which just sort of fell into my life. And Alain Renoir said, “Graduate School of Education at Harvard, they need somebody to teach English Education. Would you like to do that?” I said, “Sure!” I had never in my adult life been east of the Rockies. I was [unclear]. Didn’t give it any other thought.

Can I backtrack for a moment?

SR: Sure.

PN: This was job-hunting time, and I had looked at places I wanted to go: New Hampshire, Dartmouth, Montana. I wanted to be in the mountains and in the snow, ski and do things like that. Berkeley is Berkeley, and Ian Watt, who was in charge of graduate students, looked at my list and just crossed them off—wordlessly crossed them off, one after the other. There was a certain pride: Berkeley goes to Harvard and to Yale. You don’t fiddle around with Montana—in those days.

SR: Yeah, I understand.

PN: It was very different. In fact, a couple of years before—some years before—had been the Cuban missile crisis, and I was scared for our children, for us, and I said to Ian Watt, the Englishman, “I have a job offer at University of Otaibell

[phonetic] in New Zealand.” And he looked at me and he said, “People try terribly hard to get away from there.” (laughter) So that was out. So anyway, Harvard was there, didn’t offer the job. I was to meet the person in charge of whatever the big lower-division English education thing is called at Harvard. Hal Martin was a very imposing and *very*, very nice man. He later became president of Union College in New York. He was overseeing all this. He was their liaison to the Graduate School of Education and the English Department—he was in both. And we met at an MLA conference, we were to meet, and I was very impressed by him. We talked over dinner or a drink or whatever, and then I was just so impressed, and I was in awe, and I was on my best behavior, and it started snowing, and it snowed and it snowed, and we were snowed-in at the MLA in New York. He said, “Obviously we’ve got to room together.”

SR: Oh, how interesting, how things happen.

PN: (laughs) How things happen! So we talked all night, just had a ball. He had a bottle of something, and we had a wonderful time, and I was hired!

SR: Oh, that’s a marvelous story!

PN: So we packed our stuff and our three little boys and drove our whatever it was.... What was the car that....

HN: A Rambler.

SR: A Nash Rambler. I remember Nash Ramblers.

PN: Okay, we drove cross country with our three boys. At Harvard we were welcomed by an old fishing buddy from Berkeley who had been at Harvard two years before I got there. Larry Benson was a medievalist in the English

Department. He was master to Quinzy Alice [phonetic]. We had been friends here, as I said, had gone fishing together here.

There's a *little* diversion here, which is sort of a personal kind of thing that has to do with Harvard. We had a friend here—who's dead now—Al Senett, who was mayor of Tiburon—not then, though, but later. And he was from Harvard Law School. You know, it sounds rich, but in a way my upbringing, in some ways was sort of sparse—my experience, the economics. It was tight and hard and not terribly broad. And I really felt a little out of place, going to Harvard. I didn't know much about Harvard, but I felt catapulted a little fast. Al Senett, who really knew Harvard, said, "Just stick a hay seed in your teeth and wear some overalls, and you're just what they want. You'll be a breath of fresh air. You're just what they're looking for." And that was sort of the case with my friend who was the medievalist and master of Quinzy House, Larry Benson. He's from some *really* poor family from Arizona. He'd been a professional Marine for about a decade, fighting in China, and came here under sort of straightened circumstances, went very fast through an extraordinary medievalist Ph.D., a very fine piece of work. He's editor of *the* Chaucer edition now that is most generally used. He sort of set the pace for what my perception of who I was, coming there. He was a good guy, he was not refined or effete or anything.

SR: That's nice.

PN: That's nice. And he was just what they wanted—he has been, his whole career there, what they wanted. And that was our welcome. So we were invited right away to be in Quinzy House, be associated with Quinzy House. I felt

uncomfortable there. I just.... I'm a little uncomfortable with a lot of people anyway, but I just didn't quite feel....

SR: Well, it's also Boston, and New England, and a totally different culture.

PN: Boston and New England, totally different sort of people. And we were [unclear] unforgettable dinner at Quinzy House. Helen and I were eating dinner at the table, and with us at the table were two other people from the faculty, a fellow named A.J. Myers, who is an oil economist, and a Mr. Kissinger. And A.J. Myers and Kissinger's dinner conversation was what oil valves to shut off under what circumstances.

SR: Oh my goodness! That's a wonderful story.

PN: I was speechless at that dinner. I was glad to get home to the children! And we lived, we got a *nice* house in Medford. I think it was \$30,000, and a big, rolling back lawn where the kids could sled. And I put a rope way, way high up in a tree, and I had a very, very fine student, one of the finest students I've had, one of my students who was with us for Helen's birthday party two months ago, David Swanger. David Swanger had been a wrestler at Swarthmore, and our boys really looked up to him. And so he went up that rope, using no feet. He just climbed up the rope. So we made a deal, any boy, when he gets up to the top of the rope, gets a lobster dinner. And I think within twenty-four hours, all three boys had been to the top of the rope.

Well, David Swanger, this ties into poetry. I'd been writing poems. I was up. I guess a hot period of writing poems was when I first met Helen. That really instigated an awful lot of poems.

SR: Inspiration!

PN: Yeah. The poems weren't always about Helen. They were about my—I guess an awful lot were about feeling somebody knocking at the doors of my isolation, because I had been totally alone, really. And that was a big experience. And I'd had an awful lot of back trouble too. And Harvard, the poems were coming fast too. I think with few exceptions, maybe creation generally, but certainly writing poetry, is a fairly young man's art often. And I was publishing a lot of poems. One of the big revelations for me at Harvard, and surely is partly just the Harvard letterhead—as a student I was nobody. And suddenly, when I was at Harvard, without my halfway trying, everything I sent in would be accepted.

SR: Because of Harvard, you felt partly....

PN: I think partly. I don't think the things were that great. But whether I started sounding off about education—about which I knew *nothing!* I mean, I'd been a supervisor for student teachers. Their education courses were preposterous here.

SR: I understand.

PN: But suddenly, I'd say, "If I give this lecture, I might as well write it down," and it would be published somewhere!

SR: Was there that pressure to "publish or perish" business at Harvard?

PN: It was no issue, because I was publishing as fast as I could write. I never felt that pressure at all. I was always writing faster than.... I don't think they were *great* things.

SR: But you did it.

PN: Oh, I *do* have in this bibliography there, probably five things, I think, are special.

SR: What are some of the things you feel are special? Do you want to share?

PN: Yeah. Well, somebody gave me the advice when I was near the end of my dissertation, “Now go make articles out of your footnotes.” And that was good advice, and I sort of did that. I sort of did that. And I still never have—I never have written, really, significant criticism. I was diligent, and if things had a template in my mind somehow, I could work it. And I did write—first I wrote some education things, because that’s where my home was, in the School of Education. But they were off the top of my head, but they got published. But I was writing about the aftershocks of my dissertation, for several years. Kafka was much more interesting to me than Thomas Mann. And Kafka had certain English literary followers which is an interesting phenomenon in itself in that little world. And so each one of those followers was an article: “Kafka and William Samson,” “Kafka and Edward Upward.” And so each of those was worth a little exploration. So that was a series that hung together.

And then one of the articles I like the most still probably, is...
Somewhere in some journal there’s lots of notebooks, diaries and journals of Kafka. He said that the most interesting book, that as a child had the most effect on him, was—translating the title—*Memoirs of a Sugar Baron*. And I thought, “What the hell? What’s this?” So I got myself the book. I had to get it from Germany. There was no copy in the United States. I read it. Why would this interest Kafka? And I developed that into what was a really interesting article then.

[END OF PART 1 of transcription, at minute 147:08 in first sound file. Go to new document for continuation.]

Professor Peter Neumeyer
April 12-14, 2010
interviewed by Susan Resnik
for San Diego State University
~6½ hours of recording total
PART 2 OF 3 PARTS

(continuing from previous document, first sound file, Min. 147:08)

PN: Just intellectually interesting about Kafka being he, why would this particular book have been of interest to him? And I liked that article, that was a good one, because it was really original, and it really told something, it wasn't rehashing the same old story again. So that was one that meant a lot to me.

I wrote a series of articles. For some reason, of all of Shakespeare's plays, the one called "Coriolanus" spoke to me. I don't know why, but it moved me. So I wrote a series of articles about "Coriolanus." So there I was, writing about Shakespeare. I was a little sloppy, I was haphazard, because I wasn't that scholarly, and I was *very* busy. I was teaching, and I was playing with the children, and doing everything else in life.

SR: What a nice life!

PN: It was a nice life, but I wasn't terribly scholarly. And you shouldn't really write an article about Shakespeare without looking to see what somebody else has written first. So I wrote three, four articles about "Coriolanus," and then I read the introduction to the Penguin "Coriolanus," and my colleague in the English Department, Harry Levin, had written in his own very fine way, virtually the same thing I had written already. There it was! I wouldn't count any of that, scholarship. It was sort of rhetoric. But it got published.

Then, I had two colleagues.... Let's see, I told you about going to St. John and "Midsummer Night's Dream." And we were told about Zack, our oldest, going to some not very good New England school, red brick thing. "You cannot take him out of school." And so I wrote a poem for some education journal called "You cannot take him out of school, he will miss the very best, long division first, and language all the rest," or something like that. And these things.... So then I started putting....

Ah! this is relevant: I got a fungus between my toes, and I went to the health center, and a very Harvard-y dermatologist with tweed jacket takes my toes apart and looks at me and said, "The flora of the earth is certainly changing these years." So I wrote a poem about that, and published it in the *International Journal of Dermatology*.

SR: That's wonderful!

PN: That kind of stuff was fun! And my student, David Swanger, who was young and handsome then, was an aspiring poet. And he said, at Helen's birthday party two months ago—and he's said this to me before—that he really took this as a model, that you could have a rounded life, could teach and write poetry, and have children, and do all this together.

SR: I was just going to say, when you were describing your life, that you were a great role model, rather than someone who just does one thing.

PN: It was very sweet. That's what David was saying. He just retired at Santa Cruz. He's been teaching aesthetic education there. That's what he said at Helen's birthday party.

SR: That's lovely. So at Harvard, okay, Kafka and all of this, did you start to think about the courses in children's literature while you were at Harvard, or was that after?

PN: No, that was at Harvard in—I have the year. I didn't write it down right now. First course.... Why didn't I put the year?! It was probably two years after we got there. We got there in '63-'64. Probably '65. I was teaching. In English education I always had one colleague, first Max Bluestone who's dead now, and then Wayne O'Neill who's at MIT now. They're stories in themselves. I don't want to digress, because they're interesting, but they're digressive. And with them, I would always teach "How to Teach English," or.... We always pushed it very hard toward being normal English courses, rather than.... They weren't history of literature, but they were criticism courses really, or courses about language, and careful reading, careful writing. Wayne, who was at MIT, is a linguist by trade, not a literature person. Well, I mean his field was pharoh-eze [phonetic], old, *old* English. So we would teach these general courses for the MAT program, which we ran, the two of us always. I don't know how many, there may have been forty students at a time. One time I taught a course in curriculum—I didn't have any idea what I was doing—with the superintendent of schools of New Orleans. We team taught that course together. He was delightful, we had a good time together, and we shucked as much off on visiting lecturers as we could, and did our best. I've never seriously taken an education course before. And then, through a story we'll probably go into next time, about Gorey—we'll skip over that, but you remind me.

SR: I will.

PN: Whenever it was, 1965 or so, the Gorey-Neumeyer book, the first one, *Donald and the dot, dot, dot*, was published.

SR: I love that!

PN: It's hard not to digress into that. But sticking with the teaching, the students thought since I wrote a children's book, I must know something about children's books. And I'd never thought.... I had done my own children's books, which I'll show you one tomorrow. At the time, I watercolored them on little....

SR: I remember the story, which we'll go into tomorrow, of how that happened.

PN: Yeah. But I knew nothing about it. This was, by definition, graduate school, so therefore they wanted a seminar on children's literature. Well, two things—or one thing, I'm not sure—there were such courses in library schools and education schools. But there wasn't any precedent in a literature department.

SR: That's amazing.

PN: You know, before women's literature, before gay literature, children were the great.... Francelia Butler [phonetic], who had the only course I know of in children's literature—she was an elderly lady at University of Connecticut, much revered—taught children's literature. And that was the only other course I know. And she founded the first journal in children's literature, probably. No, that's not true. Founded a journal, the first scholarly journal in children's literature, the name of which was *The Great Excluded*. So, you know, it fits in with the rise of, anthropologically speaking, women, gays, blacks even. It all comes to a head, sort of, in the sixties.

SR: In the sixties. All of this happened in the sixties, that's right. I remember it well!

PN: Yeah. Well, Francelia had her course up at Connecticut. She was a sensation there. She had been a detective before that. And she was a Shakespeare scholar, Ph.D. in Shakespeare. She has an autobiography—I forgot what the name of it was.

SR: That might be very interesting.

PN: Yes. I think she was abused as a child. I think it's a rough story. Francelia Butler. She had enlisted the Connecticut football team to demonstrate jump rope rhymes for her class. So she was a sensation, she was fabulous. And she invited me up there, and she said, "If you come Thursday, I'll have Maurice in." That's Maurice Sendak. I don't think I went that Thursday. I think I went another time I saw her class. It was not very relevant to me. But it just didn't exist in this country. And I worked all summer. What was very [-logue'ish, logia'ish (?)] at the time, would be in linguistics and anthropology too, was structuralism. And I somehow got a bee in my bonnet that I studied structuralism, and I would fit whatever I could learn about children's books into that. That was another—not for me, but as my career and the world went—was an important article. I wrote a structuralist article about *Peter Rabbit*. And that was much anthologized. And I guess in Wikipedia, if you look up children's literature, that's the one. That was sort of a landmark for that little tiny corner of the world. So that was how I was going to go about it. And we read a Russian, Vladimir Prop [phonetic], who had all the world's plots structured in certain modes of the time.

And I got access to a fifth grade in Lexington, Massachusetts, so we had these children at our disposal. And the poor kids in the seminar were imbued by me with structuralist theory, and then applied these.... They knew how to design experiments. I had no idea, I'd never done any. In social sciences, you do this all the time, with control groups. I had no idea. I'd never been near any such thing. But they had. Some of them had been sociology majors. They knew a little about it. So they did what they did with the children, which plots they would prefer and how they would change them into what structures. They just went to town and wrote big pamphlets on it. And one of them.... Then I got a better idea. I think it was probably the next time I taught the course. I think I was disillusioned about this, and the next time I taught the course, the assignment for the seminar was, "If this were an academic subject, which it is not, but if it were, what would it look like?" And that went better. One of them wrote a book about it later. They were a pretty fancy lot of students. They were good, and they had a good time. We had a good time. I learned something. And that was my initiation to children's literature academically, out of the accident of the book.

SR: Yeah. That's very interesting, how one thing leads to another. Fascinating, yeah.

PN: Well, I'll try to get through Harvard quickly now. That's sort of....

SR: So it was Harvard where that began.

PN: Jerry Griswald at San Diego State tells me that he was looking through my stuff in the library, and he found the notes for that first class up there. God knows.... I didn't look at these things when I handed them off. God knows, did I write nasty things, shopping lists, or what?

SR: I'm not sure.... Well, we'll look together after, because I have some notes about children's literature, but I'm not sure whether it was from Harvard or not. But we'll look together after. Okay.

PN: Well, you know, it's amazing those notes still exist.

SR: Well, I think also, in reading what you've written, the whole idea that children's literature should be respected, and that it's important, did that somehow begin to come across at that early time? Or did you write more about that later, do you know?

PN: You surprise me a little bit, because I may well misremember. I didn't know I was feeling defensive or offensive about it.

SR: I didn't think it was defensive. I think you were just explaining.

PN: Explaining, yeah. You know, children's literature was pretty new to me, except what we were reading with our children. Helen knew more than I did about what was around. (aside to Helen) But that's parenthetical. I was in and out of hospitals a fair amount with major back surgery. That doesn't really.... It probably made me do 30% less than I would have otherwise, but it didn't change the nature of what I did.

SR: Tell me about your teaching with Helen in the summer.

PN: In the summer we taught.... This was a time of *so* much money. And Harvard had the most of the most money. And there was money for summer projects in Roxbury, and to send teachers out to have experimental projects. Project Physics was a *wonderful* thing going at the time. It had one big center at Harvard. It was the time of the New Math, and there were English centers across the country.

There were about eight of them. There was none at Harvard, but there was one at Oregon and a very good one in Kansas. They were generating a lot of experimental ideas, wonderfully adventurous. We were—I was—we were recipients of the after-tremors of a lot of this, and had the money to facilitate it. So Helen and I, I remember, went to one big book warehouse and just loaded up on books for the summer session. And we went out to Roxbury and we taught in conjunction with the Boston public school teachers. My notes on that are awfully funny, about trying to work with the Boston school teachers. “Why?! Why?!” But our project.... (to Helen) Gosh, if you could find for tomorrow that lovely picture of you sewing a costume with that little girl....

SR: That would be marvelous!

PN: Oh, it's a *beautiful* picture. You have that somewhere. But we taught. I made the center of that.... I think somehow *Treasure Island* we did, but the center of it was *Beowulf*, for a fifth grade. That is a seventh-century English epic. I thought it's got to work, because Beowulf, the hero, wrestles with Grendel, the Evil One's mother, and he rips her arm out by the roots, the poet has it. So we had a great big arm with the roots hanging out of it, hanging over the classroom door or somewhere on the wall.

SR: Oh! They must have loved that! I can imagine!

PN: It was a good summer. And Helen did her things: some music. You have a beautiful picture playing the violin with a little girl. And sewing costumes. You brought, I think, my mother's sewing machine along. And sewing a costume for Beowulf, probably.

SR: That's great. They must have loved it.

PN: We had a good time. The Boston School System was not in tune with us. My journals are awfully funny on the expressions of distress from Boston. But it was a good summer for us. I don't know, it doesn't fit into any larger educational theory. It was just we had a good time.

HN: Moffit.

PN: Moffit. That's more important to you than to me, really, I think. It became important later in teaching of English. There was a man named Jim Moffit, younger than I was, who was working on a sort of—in the spirit of the times, a very, very comprehensive English curriculum that Houghton-Mifflin latched onto then. And it became an enormous and *very* expensive project with teaching cards and movies—I don't know videos—but movies and cards and pictures and curriculum books. Helen and I were involved with a number of other authors writing books for Jim Moffit's project, which he got a grant from somewhere to do it. Here's the pile of books that I or we did.

SR: Oh my, this is a pile!

PN: It's a pile.

SR: And so you have sonnets. I see, you have a whole array here.

PN: Yeah.

SR: Poetry.

PN: Helen did a beautiful one on maps. Anyway, they're all of a kind, really. It was a lot of fun to do. We met nice people doing it, enthusiastic people. There was some money in it. Houghton-Mifflin was okay. And Jim Moffit was a nice man.

It turned out in the long run to be too complicated: his whole machinery was intellectually so intricate, like a great machine, all these parts. You know, all these parts had to integrate into a larger pedagogical theory. And Jim was *so* complicated. Jim was a lovely man. He died of cancer about seven years ago. He lived here in Mariposa, in the foothills of the Sierra. We knew him all his life, and his wife, and his nice children. He was a very, very nice person. He was a lousy, lousy, lousy teacher. He was just very theoretical, and he hit the headlines for a while when we were in West Virginia, because his books were banned in West Virginia. I forgot why.

SR: I was wondering why.

PN: And there are a couple of books about West Virginia banning books. He's the centerpiece of a book-banning affair in West Virginia. I can Google it later. It's called *Smoke From the Hills*, or something, I don't know what. It was notorious at the time, the case around these books. I forgot what it was.

We had a little trouble with the books. What's the nursery rhyme about "somebody pulled the plug in the bathtub and the little baby went down the drain"? That was about abortion, really.

SR: Oh, I get it. I was wondering. That must have been *something*.

PN: There was a fair amount of such things, yeah. So we didn't know any of these things, but they all come up eventually, when somebody's looking for them.

SR: But these are marvelous. Oh my goodness!

PN: We have a box, a ton of cards. Where should they go? Should they go to San Diego State?

SR: Of course. Absolutely San Diego State.

PN: A couple of them are valuable because they have Gorey illustrations.

SR: San Diego is the perfect place for them, because that's what they would really be honored to have. Oh, look at these illustrations!

PN: So that was that.

SR: How long were you at Harvard?

PN: Seven years. Harvard—how to explain that? Getting tenure was not really that important or that much on my mind. Several things.... I didn't really expect it. Cal had—I say this is pre-affirmative action—sort of a gentlemen's agreement. They would take Harvard's most personable young man, and Harvard would do the same. They'd sort of exchange one a year. That was sort of an unofficial thing. It was totally unofficial, but it sort of worked out that way. And I guess that year I was sort of that person. So I didn't really think of going there for a career. I didn't put myself out to get tenure. I don't even know if I applied for it. That was sort of the normal amount of time. What it was, the way I looked at it was, you're given the perfect platform, now make it what you want, young man, see what you can do with this. We'll give you time and money—they had both. I got \$13,500, the highest salary any new Ph.D. ever got from the English Department. I was interviewed by the dean of Harvard at the time. The dean later was Ted Sizer, who became very important in American education. But when I came, it was somebody else. I had had offers at that time when I got my Ph.D. from.... We left the phone off the hook. Those were golden days. But Berkeley, Wisconsin, Washington, I don't know where else—Indiana, I think. And Harvard

was the choice. The dean and I had talked there about the conditions of work, and the next day he called me and said, “You know, we forgot to mention salary.” I didn’t want to bring it up. That’s silly today, but in those days.... And he said, “We’ll match anybody else, don’t worry about it.” And they did. I never worried, and I never knew in advance.

The other thing is, I really didn’t want to be in a school of Education. That’s not the people I talked with. And also, when I first got to Harvard, an older man from Science Education took me aside at a party and said—this is within my first three months there—“Young man, if you expect to make a go of it here, you’d better learn how to ask for money.” I didn’t know what this meant. I was not that worldly.

SR: Yeah, I understand that too.

PN: I didn’t know about grants. So I did my work and it was okay. So it was time to leave.

SR: So where’d you go?

PN: I forgot where I had interviews. Among other places, UC-Riverside. But I went down to Stoney Brook. And Irving Ribner, who was at the time a distinguished Shakespearian, interviewed me, and he was so nice, and he was so charming and winning, and he was so funny! He was a fat man, and we’d eat dinner at the faculty club, and he’d drop an olive on the floor and he didn’t quite know whether he could [pick it up]. And he wanted it so badly. It was so hilarious. And when he said.... In some ways, I guess I was still young. I was pretty naïve, even at that age. I respected him greatly as a scholar, as somebody in the field. I was a

young assistant professor. He was a distinguished editor of Shakespeare. And he said to me, “You know, if you came here, I just might stay on as chairman for a while longer.” And that was such an uncalled for, winning, charming thing to say.

SR: Absolutely.

PN: And unplanned. He was not a man of much self control. You know, it was sort of loose. He died, and I wrote a poem for him in *The Shakespeare Newsletter*, because he was a very distinguished editor. He was a very nice man, a very human man, very fallible, and just lovely. I liked him. Had nice children and nice wife. They sort of took care of us in Stoney Brook at first.

SR: When did you go there, do you remember? It was after seven years at Harvard, so....

PN: Yeah, Stoney Brook, 1969-75. And then while I was at Stoney Brook, I was teaching sort of general English courses, survey courses. I’d always done sort of odd things like the children’s literature, or teaching combination. I wasn’t that deeply.... For a first-rate university, I wasn’t that specialized. And I didn’t teach easy, teaching was stressful for me. I worried about it lot. Work and work and work. What if this student asks that, what’ll I say? I was not a relaxed teacher at all. I might be now, but I wasn’t then. I very often taught sort of marginal things like How to Teach Composition, or things that weren’t really 17th century poetry or something like that, which I actually, in retrospect, knew enough about, but I didn’t think I did. I’d written—well, there’s the whole children’s book chapter here, which I’ll stay away from for a minute. There’s several things at Stoney

Brook. At a certain point, I became director of the composition program. The person who had that, I don't know what happened to him. He and I actually wrote a textbook together called *Elements of Fiction*, which is a short story textbook. All these books are here [unclear]. Jack Carpenter, who was my buddy in this, and I, wrote the book. Well, we didn't write the book, we wrote the teacher's manual, and organized the stories, and edited the book and so on. And then I had this sort of administrative job, being director of composition. So I'd had exposure to teaching composition a fair amount, ever since I was a T.A. About that time, 1970, probably, in the history of the field, composition, rhetoric was a big thing at Harvard in the mid 19th century. And then the subject—composition departments now call themselves, often, rhetoric departments, or rhetoric and composition. And that field sort of lightened up a lot until the middle of the 20th century. And then composition specialty departments started developing within English departments, and people got theoretical interests in the subject, and that was sort of new. And so I was in this at the time it was really beginning. And I'd never taken a course. Like everything else, I'd never taken a course. I really didn't know what these people were learning. I taught some of these people at the beginning of their career, and I sort of bootstrapped what I was learning. And now it's a whole professional thing in itself, *very* complex, with its own language and so on. But it wasn't then, fifty years ago, sixty years ago.

SR: Do you remember, after teaching at Harvard, how you felt about the students at Stoney Brook? I'm just....

PN: You know, again, my experience was so limited. When I was at Berkeley, I liked it, and knew my fellow students. And when I went to Harvard, I thought every library was like Berkeley or Widener. Widener was not quite as convenient as Berkeley. I took an extra year, I'm sure, at Berkeley, because I just fussed around in the library. The library was.... I did my dissertation, much of it, *in* the library. And I must have wasted a year just reading the riches. That was a *big* part of my education. I think it was for others too. And I thought every library was like that. And I got to Harvard and Widener was only a little more difficult to get around in, but the same. And my students, I was vaguely disappointed in them. I learned better over the decades, but I got to Stoney Brook, and gosh, they weren't quite like Harvard students, were they? And the library was not *nearly* as convenient.

SR: Right. I'm aware of the differences. I've been to Harvard, so I'm aware.

PN: I was never quite satisfied. (pause) No, that was not a major factor, though, I think. Different chapter: we made friends for life at Stoney Brook. Our kids were the right age.

SR: Helen was mentioning how life was wonderful in Stoney Brook.

PN: We lived 120 yards from a tidal inlet/river. We had a boat and we fished. The boys were all in their young teens, or nine or whatever, were in good schools.

SR: I mentioned that I love Stoney Brook, and I remember the Three Village Inn.

PN: Yes! Yeah, you mentioned that. It was a fine place. It was one of the happier places we were.

SR: Now, when you were at Stoney Brook, during that time, is that when you taught in the summer at Columbia?

PN: When was that? Probably not. And that Columbia was no big deal. Where was it?

SR: Let's see, I pulled out something....

PN: No, it would have been later, because the person who got me that job was Stephen Roxburg, and Stephen Roxburg was later vice-president at Ferrar Strauss.

Stephen had been a carpenter. He wasn't exactly my student, he was my advisee at Stoney Brook. He went from Stoney Brook to Ferrar Strauss as a typist, and then became director of their children's division eventually; and then became vice-president and director of the children's division. When Bertelsmann in Germany bought Ferrar, Stephen invented his own press or founded his own press. He lived up the river in New York, up toward West Point. Nyack! And that's important only because he had left Ferrar—we had been friends ever since he was a student—he was working for a couple of years on a business plan for his new company, Front Street Press, which is not trivial press. And lightning came down his chimney and wiped out his laptop. He had all his planning and work.

SR: Wow!

PN: And then I did a job for Stephen about translating a German novel probably about five years ago, called *The Black Brothers*. Then Front Street got bought by Boyds Mill Press. I don't know if Stephen is retired now. I don't know, we haven't been in touch for a couple of years, but we've been friends a long, long time.

Helen was one of the founders of an environmental center at Stoney Brook, and that made for new friends too, and a lot of mutual work together. That was fun.

HN: The Christmas plays.

PN: Christmas plays. Oh! we had such good friends! For Christmas we would get often, not always, modern reworkings of some medieval legend having to do with Christmas or Noah's flood, or the story of Daniel. And we would, with our friends, including the ones I mentioned earlier, and their children, make big pageants. We would have streamers and banners. Everybody would read, and parents would come. That was very festive. We just disposed of the last banner in the last three years—had moths in it. And we see these friends still constantly.

SR: Wonderful.

PN: It was a good time for the boys.

SR: It sounds like a wonderful time.

PN: I wrote. In Stoney Brook I wrote the short story textbook *Elements of Fiction*. I'd done two more books with Gorey. I think the last probably overlapped with Stoney Brook. I did a book called—this was the only time except recently that I had an agent, and I wrote a book called *The Faithful Fish*, which has nothing to do with Gorey. It was a true story. Harvard had a summer cottage on an island, Cranberry Island, off Maine. And it had a wonderful long pier. There were hardly any people there. They had a cottage, and if you're new on the faculty and they wanted to be nice to you, they sent you up there for the summer or for a few weeks.

SR: How nice!

PN: (aside to Helen) Our boys fished off that pier, and off of that experience I wrote *The Faithful Fish*, about a fish that keeps getting caught over and over, and the

people who catch him are so worried that the next people who come to the cottage won't know to let him go. There it is! That's *The Faithful Fish*.

SR: Oh, I'd like to look at this some more.

PN: Sure.

SR: Oh, wow.

PN: And in those days, for that short time, I had high hopes of writing a lot more children's books. A poet I loved very dearly from the early 19th century, John Clare [phonetic]. He was what the British quaintly called a peasant poet. He was unlettered. He was a farmer. He was a plow man. He couldn't spell and he couldn't punctuate, and he wrote poems that are very moving.

SR: How nice!

PN: Beginning his mind started leaving him, and he was probably about thirty, and he got very confused. He thought he was the heavyweight champion of Great Britain. He thought he was still married to a girl who had long ago gone and married somebody else. He ended up in a madhouse, and he wrote his last forty years of poems confined to the madhouse.

SR: Oh my!

PN: And his story is quite something, I think. And I've always been very fond of John Clare, very fond of him. And so at Stoney Brook also, I wrote *Homage to John Clare*, which is a book in which on the left-hand side there are John Clare's poems, and on the right-hand side are my answers to him, usually in poetry. So we have this conversation.

SR: That's beautiful!

PN: So we have this relationship.

SR: Back and forth.

PN: A relationship back and forth.

SR: What a great idea!

PN: It was a good idea. I had that year in Stoney Brook, I was sort of depressed. I was just not feeling very good. And Clare was obviously unsettled. Every morning I would get a Clare poem and write an answer every morning. That was sort of the way I kept myself together that year. I did that with considerable regularity and focus.

SR: That's fascinating.

PN: So that's *Homage to John Clare*. I like the book. That is, it came from something out of my life that was important to me. I got over that. The book was published by.... Peregrine-Smith was not a bad publisher. I guess they still are. They're not much or long into literature, but they do a lot of painting and home decorating and craftsman architecture is sort of their forte. But somebody must have done a volume of poems to make me think of them. It's always hard: how to you match the publisher with.... Anyway, John Clare was certainly a part of Stoney Brook.

And then after 1975, there were several reasons, it was time to leave Stoney Brook. "A," times were not as easy anymore in '75. You couldn't just name your school. I was a little older, and I wanted a little more money. West Virginia was looking for a chairman. I applied—a crazy thing to do, I don't know anything about such things!—and got the job! We moved to Morgantown, West

Virginia. Our boys refer to it as Morganhole. It's an hour below Pittsburgh.

West Virginia is a very rustic state—very.

SR: Oh yeah. I've only been there once.

PN: I think in our day there were 3 million people there, most of them coal miners. I went there as chairman. They needed a chairman. I didn't know enough to know why do you need a chairman from outside? And today I know. Today you would ask that question: But why are you bringing in somebody from Stoney Brook? You have a department of sixty people. They were a mess, and they needed cleaning up, and they needed a lot of troubles to be cleared up.

SR: Were many of the students from families of coal miners?

PN: Absolutely! Next to Rhode Island, the unhealthiest bunch of students I've ever seen.

SR: I was going to say that my acquaintance with it is through public health.

PN: Well, it's a public health heaven, yes.

SR: Yes.

PN: Yes, yes, yes. Well, as a matter of fact, I did a lot of hiring—and I say “I” advisedly. I was a fairly autocratic administrator, both at San Diego State as director, where I was director of composition, and at West Virginia. I liked doing the hiring. I loved doing that, my favorite part of the job. I liked the people, I liked meeting them, I liked being able to do something for them. I liked to build the department with people I liked, which is not very democratic. I hired somebody at West Virginia, and I did it fairly single-handedly, and I asked him—he was a good man, I forgot where he was from—I think he was from Harvard.

He as a good hire for West Virginia. And I said, “Why did you apply to West Virginia, of all places?” And his answer was—I remember it so well—“Well, my wife is a social worker, and she’s been working in Vermont. And this is the closest we can get to Vermont, sociologically speaking.”

SR: I understand.

PN: Fascinating! Being chairman at West Virginia was a roller coaster. I think I did it as well as I could have. Well, I did it as well as *I* could have. I think I wasn’t bad, but it was hard work. I remember one faculty member who was a military man threatened to shoot up the faculty with whatever the equivalent of an AK-47 was. There were a lot of entrenched interests and ingrown families who had.... You know, many people with the same name. And very quaint, sort of British apple john or whatever [unclear].

SR: You have the genetically transmitted diseases, because of the inbreeding.

PN: Ooo, is it ever! It is ever! I knew nothing about that. There were vested interests there, and family interests in that department that I had to deal with. And funny jobs. They hired a lot of people in the war, and then they just stayed on. There were some very old ladies. And the chairman’s job on the weekend, Helen and I and one of the boys would go and paint her office for her. It was not a brilliant faculty. It was an adventure. And Helen had a good time there. They had a good music department. Helen was an acting assistant professor in the Music Department, taking somebody’s place there, and she had a good time. She started on a Ph.D. there in music education, and was doing very well, and it was only my, after three years saying, “This is it!”

SR: You'd had it! (laughs)

PN: Yeah. In a way, I wish that hadn't been, but it was. That would have been okay for Helen, except she could have finished in Los Angeles somehow. But the house we moved into in La Mesa was sinking, and we got involved in the legal mess of a sinking house.

SR: Did San Diego State reach out to you? Did you reach out? How did it happen?

PN: They did. Yeah. No, I think I applied. That was 1978, so jobs were definitely getting scarce, and San Diego State said yes. I don't know what the alternatives were to San Diego State at that point.

HN: [unclear] peacocks.

PN: That was Riverside, Helen.

HN: Yes.

PN: Was Riverside the alternative to San Diego? UC-Riverside. I phoned Helen from there and said.... No! And the place I really wanted to go, but it just was a little too dilapidated, Western Washington. I flew there, and the chairman met me. Nice fellow, good poet, and he said to me, "I hope you don't mind if I check my crab traps on the way home." And I phoned Helen, I said, "This is it!" (laughter) They were just sort of broke. And Riverside, I phoned Helen and said, "I'm walking along the walk, I don't see another human being. I just see peacocks going down the way." That was *very* exotic. But San Diego State was very welcoming.

SR: Let's see, who was the president then? What year?

PN: I don't know who was president.

SR: Was it Tom Day?

PN: No, it was the year before he came, I think. It was the year before, in 1978.

SR: Brage Golding had probably left.

PN: Yes. It was nobody I ever met, I don't think. Frank Marini was the dean. He was very positive. He's married to Elsie Adams, and they still live there. Elsie's a fine lady, she's an English professor. She was a later chairman. And they needed a director of composition, which I had done. The chairman at that point in the English Department was Fred Moremarco [phonetic]. I don't know if Fred remembers this—I've told the story often enough—if he doesn't remember it himself, he'll wonder why I keep inventing it. But in my second year there, as I recall, Fred said to me, "Somebody said once you taught a children's literature course somewhere. Is that right? We've never tried it here."

SR: That's what I was wondering.

PN: That's my memory of how it happened, after I was there a year. I did teach that course, and maybe by that time already my dear friend Dan McCloud was probably chairman by that time. He's still around—a dear man, just a lovely person. I was directing composition, and I said to Helen from the beginning.... We'd been many other places too, and I think I said in the beginning, "This one feels good. Something feels right. I'm not a great scholar, I'm not intellectually that ambitious. People are nice, it's a good place to be." I think I said that from the beginning, and I *felt* it from the beginning. I still do. I was the lucky one. I taught courses in teaching of composition, which was a profession all by itself, like orthodontia or something like that. (aside to Helen, recording paused)

SR: Okay.

PN: There are several categories of things. Some are a little more peripheral than others. Significant in the beginning was the encouragement of the dean, Frank Marini. He was just so smart, so human, and so focused. He was supposed to.... He had a.... (pause) He had a complex effect on many people, and it wasn't complex with me at all. It was very clear, it was very open, and it only made me want to come here. Fred Moremarco was fine, businesslike, got the children's.... But that wasn't part of my hiring, that came after a year maybe. I don't know exactly when Dan McCloud became chairman. He's a unique person. He's a chapter unto himself. There were several chairs after that: L.C. Adams, and Carrie Wahl [phonetic]. And after a year, without digressing too far into the children's literature.... The first course was a success. That is, my first course here. However I taught it, the material was so attractive. The material speaks for itself. You can't easily go wrong with it. And people take children's literature for a finite number of reasons. They either want to read the books they never got to as a child, or they want to sentimentally revisit those books. Those are the two main reasons, really. That was pretty much the class, probably—that was their motivation. And I think both desires were met. And it was obviously going to be a full class, I think, for a while. And pretty soon—I don't know the details of this, I just don't remember—and I was director of composition then, and *that* was keeping me busy. But it became pretty clear that there would be room for more classes, and other people would have to be hired. And so in rapid follow-up, we did a search, and Jerry Griswold [phonetic] was hired, who is still there. He had

been working for—I think he’d been in the Boston area. He was teaching [at], I don’t know, U-Mass in Boston; and had been working, I think, for Houghton-Mifflin on their dictionary; and was from University of Connecticut, was a friend of Francelia Butler. I think he’d been a student of Francelia’s—I’m not sure of that, but certainly acquainted with her well, because he had been at U-Conn and had written a dissertation on Randell Jarell, who was a first-rate American poet, critic, and author of about five children’s books. And Jerry had written about him, and came with a good reputation, and good recommendations, and has done very well for the community and for himself at San Diego State, and much I value very highly, and we’ve been good friends ever since he arrived. He’s been very sweet to me. At a certain point in my career I stopped reading *PMLA*, the *Professional Journal of*.... Too much stuff, and I’ve read them all before. And Jerry kept getting these things and getting all their advertisements. And if there was a good grant or something like that, he put the note in my mailbox. Well one time he put a note in my mailbox about a grant from the Swedish government for “research in any field.” And I said, “What the hell!” and we applied and I got the grant! to do something about juvenile literature, intermediate literature, in Sweden, for, I don’t know, half a semester, a semester.

HN: Six weeks.

PN: Six weeks, okay. The notice came about all the people who got the grant, and I read all these things, and it is a Swedish document, “Dental Health in Coal Mines,” “Public Service in the Sub-Arctic,” “Elk Herding for Maximum Profit.” All these people doing useful work of the world, and then suddenly Peter

Neumeyer doing “Translation of Refugee Adolescent Literature,” or something. Totally outside the universe of what was going on in socialized Sweden! And we went, of course, and we were treated royally. That’s a whole story in itself. We made friends, Swedish writers that we stayed in touch with forever.

SR: Wonderful!

PN: That was a good semester. That’s sort of a little digression. But this is sort of the life of children’s books that I lived at San Diego State—especially after I got out of composition, which I was in for five, six, seven years maybe. Maybe seven years.

I got a call from Stephen Roxburg, my former student at Stoney Brook, who was vice-president of Ferrar [phonetic]. And he said, “You know, we publish Tove Junsen [phonetic], who is a Swedish-Finnish children’s author, *Mumentral* [phonetic] books.” And she’s like Dr. Seuss in Sweden and Finland. She’s just *the* author. “We publish her, and it’s going to be her eightieth birthday, and there’s no notice of her. Would you like to go to Finland and look into Tove Junsen for us?” So that trip I did alone. That semester, was it when we were in Rhode Island? It was maybe after we came back. At San Diego State, near the end, I taught other places So I went to Finland and was invited—well, the whole thing was invitation. Finland had a stake in this, and they invited me, really, to the Finnish something. It’s written down here somewhere, what institute it was. And they just treated me royally for some time. And I did visit Tove Junsen, I have wonderful, wonderful photographs. Sweet little old lady. Well, she wasn’t quite that old then. It was her eightieth birthday. She was just lovely. And she’s

a major painter. And she writes these children's books, and things are sort of small, and she does the illustrations in them. And I go into her house, and there's *huge* canvases, and they're satiric and political, and she's done murals in Finnish bars. She was a remarkable woman. And maybe a year after that, we were in Beverly Hills, and I was to give a talk on her, a slide show on Tove Junsen, in the Beverly Hills Public Library. And Helen and I were walking in, and there were big pictures of Tove Junsen in the foyer. And suddenly I knew why I fell in love with Tove Junsen—she looks just like Helen! Really! It just struck me. I was drawn to her so much. And suddenly, it just bowled me over.

SR: That's nice!

PN: The Swedish consulate in Los Angeles was all involved in this talk. But anyway, these kinds of things came along with children's literature, as did.... I heard the other day that Darwin's letters are being published now. It's going to be finished in the year 2015, and there's going to be 131 volumes of letters, averaging 700-800 pages each. And I realized I can't keep up with that. But an awful lot of my life has been done with correspondence, beginning with the dissertation. And in children's literature too, I've kept up a heavy correspondence with people I was attracted to. So all through the San Diego State years, there's a writer in Oregon, Richard Kennedy, who's very good. I told him if only his stories were collected, I would happily use them in a course. And indeed, not long after, his stories were collected, and I get a copy from him. "This is a great textbook" or something like that—a dedication like that. So there's Dick Kennedy, Reinhardt Michelin Munich [phonetic]....

HN: Who came over to live with us.

SR: Oh really?

PN: That's right. Well, that was already in San Diego, wasn't it?

SR: Yeah.

PN: And Peter Sees [phonetic] who I think is the finest illustrator in America today, probably—I think. I will take a little credit here, too. I did start probably, what, seven eight years ago, I wrote a letter to the MacArthur Foundation, telling them “children are a third of our world, of population, and what they read is of some importance. And really might they not consider it—they never have—an illustrator for....” And I started making the case, and I started enrolling other people in this cause. I do have a wonderful letter from about a year later, saying, “This is about the most persuasive case we've read” in I don't know how long. And he got a MacArthur.

SR: Oh, that's wonderful! What a great thing to do for him!

PN: I'm delighted it worked. It worked.

SR: That's terrific. Oh, that's great! I applaud that! That's wonderful.

PN: That's been fun, that's been nice, that's been good. And so that kind of activity, too. So many things come out of children's books. Not that much came out of directing composition. But all this time I'm reviewing books, too, all over the place. I guess San Diego State was the golden years of that. A regular column in *The Boston Globe*. That was once a month. Occasionally *New York Times*, occasionally *L.A. Times*. I established a relationship, and it may be on the e-mail today, I asked my editor there, long ago—I want to know when it started, must be

thirty years ago almost—I got in a relationship with *Mothering* magazine, which is a very—my father would have called it “agricultural.” It’s big into breast feeding and natural childbirth. It’s just very sixties. And it was big and glossy. And I started reviewing for them. They seemed to have loved them, so I kept on reviewing for them. A couple of years ago, I was their “living treasure.” You can keep that if you want.

SR: Oh that’s so nice! Thank you!

PN: So they did a....

SR: Oh, thank you.

PN: We’ve had a very happy relationship. I don’t get involved in their debates about circumcision and all that, which is their—you know, on the front page, or on the back of my article I’ll find these things I know nothing about. But there they are. That was one of our good relationships. And occasionally the *San Diego Union Tribune*. I did, I think, probably well over a hundred little reviews for an outfit—I don’t know if they still exist—called National Parenting Center. They just had newsletters for all kinds of things you can imagine.

SR: I think I’ve heard about that.

PN: There was something on the Internet that had a name. I’ve forgotten the name. And you go to that thing and you’re suddenly in the world of National Parenting Center, and you can look up “teething,” or “Children’s books.” And I did one a day for them for a long time—one book—little mini-reviews, constantly. And advisory boards of various journals. I guess that started at Harvard. The West Virginia job went along with being on the board of something called Victorian

Literature, Victorian Poetry—I forgot which. I got very involved at Harvard with something called *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, which still exists: both doing poems for them, and then doing heavy articles for them—pretty heavy—on aesthetical subjects, which was not really my field, but I liked writing for them, and I liked corresponding with them, they were nice people—they *are* nice people.

This is the time also.... Yeah, it started at San Diego State. There's something called International Youth Library. And I read about them, they're in Munich. And I read about them, and they seemed to be a pretty big enterprise. And so I wrote them a letter and asked "who are you, and what are you, what do you do?" I was at San Diego State. That's why I put it in this chapter. I forgot about that letter until maybe a month later I get a letter that says in effect, "you've got the grant." (laughter) So that was Helen's and my first visit to—it's on the western outskirts of Munich, a place called Pasing. It's the International Youth Library. It's a creature of the State of Bavaria, the City of Munich, and UNESCO. And it's probably the world's finest collection of children's books. And they're in a 15th century, or maybe it's 14th century, old castle, which inside is entirely Swedish modern. And their collection is all underground, under the cobblestones. So you go down in these wonderful electric stacks, and you push a button and they go back and forth. They have a marvelous selection of—their books are from every country imaginable—that's their purpose, associated with UNESCO. And they have a wonderful repertoire of speakers and guests. And

this first time we went, they put us up for, I don't know, a couple of months was it? A couple of months in the castle, a little apartment.

SR: What a lovely thing!

PN: A lovely thing! In a castle, in a park, in a beautiful park, in Munich. The park is beautiful, the building is one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. And our apartment overlooked the park. I was born in 1929 in a little hospital that is connected to the same park. Because the park at the far end has the Bavarian castle.

SR: What a circle that is!

PN: And associated with the castle is this little bitty hospital. Anyway, there we were, and we were treated royally. We'd go on outings to—we didn't go to Switzerland, we went to Austria, to the Austrian Alps. For some reason we had been in Crete, hadn't we, a month before? Yeah, we'd been on a sabbatical in Crete. Do you have a picture of it?

SR: Let's look at the pictures. Oh, it's beautiful!

HN: We lived up there.

SR: Oh, how beautiful! How wonderful that you put this together, too. Look at this! Isn't this something? That's marvelous.

HN: (inaudible)

SR: That's just wonderful.

PN: So we had been in Crete a couple months before, just horsing around. I had no project in Crete. We were just on the beach. Helen had hurt her leg badly, and so

we had to stay on the beach because we couldn't go anywhere while she was recuperating.

I was corresponding with a young man named Jeffrey Garrett [phonetic] at the Youth Library. Jeff was their English *lector*. That is, he would read all the books in English and make the decisions and arrangements for visiting speakers and so on. Jeff, his past had been he'd gone to Northwestern, then he'd been in the army in Germany, then he'd been a dishwasher, then he got this job, and Jeff wrote me, to Crete, some of the most vivid, getting me ready for this visit, grant, some of the most literate engaging letters. We've had many visits to the Youth Library since. He stayed there for a while. I'll take some credit here too: I did convince Jeff that he wasn't being utilized to his maximum there. He was just too good for what he was doing there. Administratively, the place was a disaster. They were using an outdated card catalog, and they appointed their director by their scholarly record, so they were inefficient people. It wasn't run very well, but it was a gorgeous place. And Jeff just wasn't fully utilized. So I really talked him into that he should go to library school. He was so good at the administrative, and selective, and his tastes, and his literacy, and his way with people, and way of introducing guests. He had several.... Carol.... Oh, that was later, that problem. I've forgotten what the decisions were, but he came to Berkeley, and he was sensational in library school. He and Jim Hart, whom I mentioned long ago, did a Kipling exhibit in the Bancroft Room of the library that was magnificent and got a lot of publicity. Jeff was doing well in school. He got a good offer from Los Angeles, from UCLA. Carol said no to UCLA, so he went

to Purdue, which is close to home, and he was at Purdue. [unclear] stories were awfully funny that he told from Purdue. Sort of a strange place. Jeff is rather sophisticated and elegant.

Then he went directly, I guess, from Purdue to Northwestern, didn't he? Yeah, he was at Northwestern. And what did he become? Director of collections at Northwestern. And then Berkeley offered him a job as.... What was his second place year? Whatever the second rung is in library. As I say, he was staying here with us, and he was trying to decide, and Northwestern upped the offer, and his children were at Northwestern, and their music teachers, which was important—flute teachers or whatever it was. And one son is a maker of armor, and his armor-making teacher and all that is at North[western]. So Jeff got whatever the right offer was at Northwestern.

SR: That was great that you helped him.

PN: I'm delighted that it worked. I'm certainly not the only one who told him that, but it came out well.

SR: Now, let me ask you something else about San Diego State, because I'm trying to.... You created this children's literature.... Tell me how this became the special center.

PN: Jerry Griswold was hired, and....

HN: Lois.

PN: Well, that came later. Maybe it didn't. I'm not sure. Somewhere along the line, there was a big demand for students. Students, for substantive reasons, they wanted more children's literature. Secondly, it was sort of in the wind. It was a

good course with Jerry, and popular. The Education Department—or what is it, a division or a school—was very interested in having such an offering too. And the English Department devised something very clever: English 306-A and -B, which became a requirement for elementary teachers. And here's where I could easily get in trouble by not remembering the administrative [unclear]. That wasn't my strong point at all. But it was devised that there was an English 306-A, which taught about children's books to future teachers; and a 306-B in which they wrote about children's books, which fulfilled the requirement that they have a little writing skill also. And those two courses brought in *hundreds*.

SR: Well, a friend of mine who came with me to see your collection at San Diego State, took that course, and she lives across the street from us. She's become a good friend, and she speaks about it being so marvelous.

PN: Whoa! Yeah. So here what Helen was whispering came true in fairly rapid succession: more faculty was needed. Lois Kuznitz, from probably Michigan, was hired. (pause) Lois was pretty vehement in her views on gender fairness. Well, no, this is not worth talking about. We had gone *way* out of our way. (recording paused) We hired Lois Kuznitz. I think that was mainly my doing, because hiring, I always liked doing that very much. She had a wonderful background, she was a strong teacher. She quickly got student followings. She did a prize-winning book for Johns-Hopkins Press on children and toys. And she was good!

Then we hired also—I'm not sure of the sequence of all these people—one of the half-dozen best students I've had in my life—was in one of my children's

literature seminars. I think she was a T.A., so she was probably in my writing class too—advanced writing. But I know she was in the children’s literature seminar. And at that point I was writing an encyclopedia article about E.B. White. And the encyclopedia had sent me a template for what should go into the article. I remember saying to the class, “You can write about anybody you want in this class. If you don’t have any ideas, you can write an encyclopedia article about anybody you want, and follow the same template that I have here. Just use that.” And Alida Allison [phonetic], who is on the faculty now, wrote on somebody she had met in my class first, an author, Russell Hoban, and did what later turned out to be an encyclopedia article on Russell Hoban. She was wonderful! I fell in love with her from Day One. She was a good T.A. I remember her at that point in that role. And she went off to Riverside and did a dissertation on Orpheus, on the Orpheus myth. She was hired—I don’t remember the year—but I recommended her enormously highly. She was a superb student, and such a lovely person. And she’s there, and I love her still. A fascinating family—that’s another chapter. So she’s there.

This is all by way of answering “how did all this grow this way?” It grew partly because—and I don’t know what’s happened since I’ve left—but in the period I was there, such wonderful people taught it, that the word got out, and the courses were popular, and the courses were required for a big group of San Diego State students. The 501 course was the general introduction, and we could sort of do with that what we want.

Oh, another thing: the classes were large, so we had T.A.s. And some of these T.A.s were superb people. They were teaching their own sections. And the ones I remember most vividly.... That nurse—what was her name?

HN: Oh yes.

PN: Oh, she was a tough old lady! She wasn't a student exactly. And she was so good, and she was so sort of raw, earthy, and knew a lot, and learned a lot, and had good critical judgment. That's part of the reason things went well.

HN: Helen Borgun? [phonetic]

PN: Helen Borgun.

HN: (inaudible)

PN: Helen, you were teaching; and Helen Borgun was teaching. I'm trying to think of the wonderful student I had who wrote her thesis on.... Louise Strecker [phonetic], was excellent, just superb. And Helen had a joy to the whole enterprise. Then something formed that was called Children's Literature.... What was it called—Circle?

HN: Circle, at one point.

PN: Circle. That was this list of these main characters that we mentioned, plus Maggie McCarell [phonetic] from the Drama Department, who knows a lot about children's theater. And Ramon Ross, R-A-M-O-N, Ross, who became a dear friend, who's from the Education Department. And Ramon and I even co-taught a course together. That was funny. It didn't work very well. That was a funny course. Helen came and gave a guest lecture. I think that was the high point of the course. Ramon and I would be so deferential to each other. My model for the

course—I invented the idea—my model was John Griswold—not our Griswold—Griswold was dean of the Yale Law School, and he and some very distinguished other professor at Yale taught the constitutional law course together in tandem, and they were politically opposite [unclear], and it sounded so exciting. And I thought Ramon and I could do that, and it would be a thrilling clash. And we were so deferential to each other.... And Ramon is a wonderful novelist. He's written a beautiful children's book called *Harper and Moon*. For an Education professor, he writes so beautifully, so beautifully. His letters are wonderful. He's editor of a strange thing, which is a newsletter for retired faculty, who are mainly from Education, it seems. He's got me writing for it most issues now, or several issues now. I just did a piece on translation for him. But Ramon is a good novelist and a fine writer, and he's *very* interested in storytelling. And reading was his official education sort of entrée to this. But from reading, he went to being a good novelist, with a wonderful rich background of life in Walla Walla, Washington, which is very rural, and so rich. And his perceptions are so beautiful and rich. I just had enormous admiration for him, and our course was not a battle of wits by any means. It was sort of one deferring to the other, and one student said at the end, "Why don't you two get your act together?!" which was *very* appropriate. That didn't work, we didn't do it again. But we had such fun, because we co-wrote the comments on students' final papers together. It was a hilarious enterprise.

One thing other, too, is.... Two things, two sides of the same coin.

Connie Dowell is a whole new chapter in the world of San Diego State. And that's after my time. This enthusiasm and constructiveness....

SR: I was very fortunate to know her.

PN: Do you?

SR: Yes.

PN: I might still be teaching if that had been there, because this Children's Literature Circle with Maggie and Ramon, we went once to Dean Najafi of the Education School, and he was terrific. He sort of administratively, bureaucratically pulled together.... He was a commander in the Coast Guard, I think, and he sort of had an administrative mind. And he was so good at helping us how to articulate what was on our mind. And I think that was part of the birth of that 306-A-B course, too. He knew what he was doing. He was *so* good.

And I went to Dean Detweiler at Arts and Sciences, or whatever it's called, Arts and Humanities. I went to him for some help with some organizational matter about this. And he was so supportive. He was a funny guy. He was from a somewhat dry historical field from my perspective. I think he was a very high officer in the Marine Reserve, and he was from the same mold. He lived in a somewhat different world than what I was moving around in. And it was so helpful and so welcoming. That's typical of San Diego State in my experience. If you had something like that and needed help, people were on your side to try to make it successful.

SR: That's so nice to hear. I know in moving to San Diego, I just have that feeling about San Diego. I don't know, it seems to be that way.

PN: It's a positive.... All by way of contrast, our Children's Literature Circle with the library, the children's collection, I felt, was a disaster, was going to hell. I did gather—I forgot who—our forces, the Children's Literature Circle. I forgot who went, but I organized that we go to whoever was director of the library—somebody before Connie. He was an engineer from somewhere. He was an interim director. And my complaint was—part of it was that these books were not together, you couldn't get at these books. How would you find the books? How would you know where they are, if they're scattered all over? And so on. And in essence his response was, "Hell, you ain't seen nothin' yet! In our ideal library, you won't *see* any books, you'll just put in a slip and from somewhere the book will arrive and you can read it, and you don't have to mess with messy books."

SR: Messy books!

PN: I'm paraphrasing, but not realizing serendipity is how you get there. Book people spend their life serendipitously.

SR: That's right.

PN: Whoever we were—I've forgotten who, from that group—we left depressed. So when I heard first of Connie's effects on that place....

SR: She's marvelous.

PN: Just sensational. It would have tempted me to stay on longer. Whereas instead, in those last two years I deserted the ship a couple of times. We went to the University of Wales.

SR: What was that like?

PN: Ah, that's a story in itself! And we went to the University of Rhode Island, which was sort of a pitiful story, because the place was so fiscally poor and run down. The students were the only ones I've seen that are less healthy than West Virginians. They were always out with.... They weren't lying, they really were out with respiratory ailments. I don't know, it was just an unhealthy place, and running out of money.

But Wales, we had such a good time. I can't really talk about the teaching much. I taught on Friday afternoons, or maybe it was Friday mornings. What I did was trade places with Peter Hunt, who was my counterpart at the University of Wales. He's a little younger than I am, he's probably ten years younger, and very diligent, and very administratively and bureaucratically very handy and very clever and very good and well known. He came here, and it wasn't fair, because as I say, my teaching was Friday morning, I think, and he got a *heavy* load here. He had to teach an awful lot. He lived in our house, and we lived in his in the Cotswolds.

SR: How nice! I know the Cotswolds.

PN: It was heavenly! We lived in his weaver's cottage, which was not quite wide enough to turn around in. It was so beautiful. We'd go walking. We had the whole week to ourselves, hunting mushrooms or going nice places. I did teach at Wales, and the students were very nice, very dutiful. I was not teaching children's literature. I think I was just tutoring a bunch of students. And they had different subjects, diverse subjects, 17th century poetry or whatever. I think I sort

of pushed it in directions that would be interesting for them and for me. But that was the job. And I think Peter—I'm not sure if he was on sabbatical or....

HN: Yes. So they arranged that.

PN: Was I on sabbatical?

HN: No.

PN: So I got the better deal, by far. And then we did the same thing with Rhode Island: somebody took my place at San Diego, and we stayed in his house in whatever little town in Rhode Island it was. That was all in the last three years, so I occasionally deserted San Diego State in those days.

SR: So San Diego State, clearly you contributed so much to it, and now you are continuing to. This is really an ongoing continuous relationship, it seems. I know they are excited about hearing this oral history, and also about your collaboration with Edward Gorey. They want to certainly foster your continuous....

PN: Well, they have my [unclear], they'll have my books, what the children don't put dibs on—if they want them. I told Connie.

SR: That's great. They really are excited about that. (recording paused)

PN: Well, the Children's Literature Circle had beneficent effects beyond itself. It *did* draw to itself, through its diverse people, all these talents in it, did draw both.... It initiated events so that I know one time Dr. Seuss [Theodore Geisel] was the speaker, right? And he donated to, for the event, a design or tee shirt that was on a design, and that was a whole Dr. Seuss week or month or whatever it was.

And then another time there was a fine folklore meeting where Sue Bodingheimer [phonetic], who is a major scholar—I think she's at Princeton

now—she was then at Stoney Brook—came out and was one of the.... I think she was just *one* of the major speakers. There were several speakers of distinction. I don't remember who those were. And these kind of events at that time, that was.... I don't know how it's doing now. At that time, that was a high-water mark because it drew San Diego area librarians. The library was working in synch with us, the San Diego Library. Parents, we had outreach into the community.

SR: That's great!

PN: You know, probably largely through other people, like Maggie McCarol [phonetic]. (recording paused)

SR: Well, as we look on, and think what *else* was going on over these years, you had extensive work and collaboration and working on *Charlotte's Web*, and also with Edward Gorey. Let's talk about those times, and what you did, tomorrow.

PN: Good! Sounds fine!

SR: Sounds fine to me too.

PN: I look forward to it.

SR: Me too.

[END FIRST SOUND FILE, BEGIN SECOND SOUND FILE]

SR: Today is Tuesday, April 14, 2010. This is Susan Resnik continuing our interview with Professor Peter Neumeyer. Good morning again, Peter!

PN: Good morning! I'm so glad you're here again.

SR: I'm glad to be here. I think you mentioned that you'd like to talk a little bit more about West Virginia. Would you share that with us?

PN: I would like to, very much. One little incident I didn't mention last time, and then I'd like to fill in a little bit on San Diego State, which was on my mind in the night. But to fill in just one item from West Virginia, which was really one of the high points—and I'm reminded of it because I have wonderful photographs of it here—there's a superb, very well-known South American author, Jorge Luis Borges. And that was an incident at West Virginia that was really quite unforgettable. I had had an administrative argument with the president of the university about something or other that was happening under my chairmanship, and I was quite angry. One time I was storming into the president's office, full of rage and excitement about something that had or had not happened—I forgot what the cause of it all was—but he said, "Calm down, Neumeyer. Maybe there's something I can do for you someday." The president's office, by the way, the décor was on his bookshelf. On the president's bookshelf, there were three things: a model of the rapid transit system, a hard hat, and a big piece of coal. These were all symbols of West Virginia, really. And I said, "Yes, well, there *is* something you can do. Remember about a year ago you sent out a questionnaire, 'Who should get an honorary degree at West Virginia? Please fill it out.' And I filled it out, and that's the last I ever heard of it." And he said, "Well, tell me about it." And I said, "Well, there's a very wonderful visiting professor at Michigan State. He's the most famous writer in the western world maybe right now, Jorge Luis Borges. He's a constant annual nominee for the Nobel prize, and he's written a great deal. He's Argentinean, and his academic field was English literature. He's this expert in Old English verse. And he was librarian of the

National Library of Argentina, but then Peron came in and kicked him out, and assigned him a job as chicken inspector. So he was a chicken inspector in Argentina, until the government changed again, and he came into some of his rightful heritage as a famous author. And as I say, he's at Michigan State now, and I think he would honor the university by getting an honorary degree here." He said, "Well, you go back to your office, settle down, calm down, and let's see what we can do." So I went back to my office. It wasn't long before I got a phone call that said, "You got your man." What the president had been doing—his name was Harlow—President Harlow had been something big in the Truman administration before he was president of West Virginia University. Anyway, I got a call, "You got your man." Indeed, Jorge Borges was invited to get an honorary degree, and he did accept, and he did come. He was quite blind—he was 95% blind. We took care of him, and he did get an honorary degree, he did give a talk, we did have a luncheon for him I remember. His field was Old English and Old Norse, so these strange Teutonic languages. I arranged that at lunch he would sit next to a Professor Whitaker from the German Department whose field was Old English, and who was *also* blind. So things worked out pretty well. It was my job to squire Borges around the university for a few days. Here I have photographs of Borges and me.

SR: Oh, marvelous.

PN: I treasure those. He got his honorary degree, he did give a talk, he gave a talk I had heard him give before. He's very strange when he gives a public talk. He lays a pocket watch in front of him, so he can see that he doesn't run over. But

he's blind, so he can't see the pocket watch anyway! It's all part of the stage set. But there we are in the cafeteria, talking together. We actually had a good time together.

SR: That must have been really a highlight in West Virginia, to have someone like him come.

PN: A highlight for West Virginia, yes. It was not the normal sort of thing. I did want to get that in, the visit of Borges.

SR: I think that was clearly....

PN: ... honorary degree.

SR: Yeah, special.

PN: And the talk. I don't think Morgantown, West Virginia.... I said, "Shouldn't this be on the FM station, this event?" And they said, "We didn't think anybody would be interested." But Helen and I had a dinner for Borges at our house, and people came from as far as Washington, D.C. People came from a long way, that we had invited. I remember Borges was sitting there after dinner at our house, and he had two seeing-eye people with him. He had a very, very beautiful woman whose name I have forgotten—I should know it, because she became important in the context of Borges later—half Japanese, half Caucasian woman, who was his primary seeing-eye person, his companion, and he married her later.

SR: That must be interesting!

PN: And somewhere there's a very good picture in the house—I'll try to find it later—of her. She's a very beautiful woman. Then he had a seeing-eye man, too, his main translator was from Michigan. That's why he was at Michigan State. And I

remember after dinner we were sitting there in our living room, there were bookcases all around, all over his head and so on. And his seeing-eye man, or his translator, said to him, “Borges, can you guess what book is right over your head there?” Borges said, “No, I have no idea.” And he said, “Well, it happens to be Lernvat’s [phonetic] translation of the *Kalavala*, which is the Finnish national epic. That happened to be in my library, and it happened to be the translation of a man named Lernvat, and Lernvat, Borges’ writing is full of these kind of games, he has a murder mystery story called “The Garden of the Fourteen Paths.” And the main character in that is the detective named Lernvat. He got the name from the translator of the *Kalavala*. And Finnish was close to his academic interests anyway. All these things sort of come together, three degrees of separation, and it was quite wonderful.

SR: That’s right. And in West Virginia, of all places.

PN: In West Virginia! When he arrived in West Virginia, he took out of his pocket—Borges did—a little lead pellet. And he said, “I picked this up in Gettysburg. I’d always wanted to see the site of the Civil War.” This visual imagery always wanted to see. I mean, he was almost totally blind. Which reminds me, at San Diego State later, I had a very nice colleague for some years, Craig Werner, who was born blind. He would phone me and he’d say, “I’m watching a *wonderful* “Alice in Wonderland” on television. You ought to turn it on!” And his hobby was bird watching. All these visual things that come into the lives and the language of blind people, all of them.

SR: Yes, that’s interesting.

PN: Fascinating. So Borges carried on—or actually, he was the precursor—to my familiarity with Craig Werner, whom I mentioned, I think, yesterday, of being at Battleheim’s [phonetic] talk and telling me, “Let me tell you about my dreams sometimes, all the things I see in them,” when Battleheim had said, “Blind people don’t see things [unclear].”

SR: Yes, you shared that.

PN: So that was Craig Werner. Anyway, the blind people in my life come together.

SR: Yeah. Well, as you say, from West Virginia to San Diego State. And I’d like you to share a little bit more about San Diego.

PN: Yeah. I left out a major chapter, and I was tired last night, I think, and Helen remembered this morning—or she felt it yesterday—and she’s absolutely right: our life in San Diego was *teeming* with activity. There were people—and I wish I could get her to be in the room for this, because she can nudge me. Do you mind if I ask her [to come in]? (recording paused) And I gave the impression last time....

SR: Okay, Peter, I’m going to turn it on again.

PN: Okay. I really left out a good deal of San Diego State, and I left out chapters that really turned out to be rich, such as the whole Green Tiger chapter, which I’d like to insert at this point.

There was a publisher in San Diego before Harcourt-Brace got there, and we were quite involved. We really were *very* involved with Harcourt. And the arrival of a major publisher like Chevrolet, like Harcourt-Brace, you know. Enormous factor in American publishing. They headquartered in San Diego at

that time. And that was a big opportunity for children's books, and for San Diego State, and for future jobs for our students. They could get jobs there, and they *did*. We sent a lot of students there. They'd go there—typical of publishing—you go there as a typist and end up as a vice-president. That's just how things work. There weren't that many first-rate jobs for very literate, good students. Harcourt's presence in San Diego helped a lot.

But also, there was a publisher named Green Tiger Press, and Green Tiger Press bought an old Packard car dealership and used that space. (aside to Helen) And two very imaginative people, Harold and Sandra Darling, bought this old Packard dealership and used the space as both a factory and editorial offices for Green Tiger Press. I don't know what year they started, but one time I wrote—after I was at San Diego State—I wrote the Green Tiger Press for doing a lot of interesting children's books. They were pretty shrewd. They got things that were out of copyright and revived them, or got illustrators. They had a greeting card business full of out-of-copyright sentimental things—some of them corny, some of them very good. Just tons of stuff. I think we have everything downstairs of theirs—probably *everything*—just their catalogs were fascinating. And they were very shrewd. Green Tiger Press. Where they got their name, I think they were very sentimental about the Detroit Tigers baseball team, which nobody followed the Detroit Tigers, but that went into the name of their company. And they hired interesting people who weren't in academe, just a lot of sensitive people who were sort out of the mainstream. Very, very nice people. And Harold and Sandra Darling of Green Tiger Press were really a study in themselves, and I

don't want to go into them, even if I did understand them, which I don't. But they underpaid their people and made them very loyal to the company, for ulterior motives, nonfinancial. So they got a very loyal working group that they, perhaps of necessity, underpaid, who were immensely talented. They got very knowledgeable about.... They had a special thing for children's books. This was a real intellectual.... They were a strange mixture of very shrewd businesspeople and exploitative, and sensitive. And children's books especially, because children's books is what gets illustrators. After all, there aren't that many illustrated books in the world. But children's books are a niche where an illustrator can let loose, and where he can be published, if there's no other outlet, really, in the real world. And so children's books between 1870 and 1930 were sort of a specialty, and they got a lot of.... And the illustrations are out of copyright, and so their greeting card business and their illustrated books. And people sent in manuscripts. I wrote them a letter saying, "I'm around here, and I know a little about this, and if I can be helpful in some way, I'd like to do some work for you." They seemed happy with that. Before long, Helen too got a job, as an editor.

HN: Started as Harold's assistant in the business end, but didn't know anything about business, so....

PN: Well, you know more than you say. But you were editing, and people would send in manuscripts, and we got to know people, and we got to know an awful lot of interesting people: writers, illustrators, who'd send manuscripts. The aftermath of this still clutters our files. (aside to Helen) Some of the people who sent in

manuscripts are authors of some note still, and we still are.... (pause) We're still in touch with some of those people. Pat Lewis is a prolific children's poet. And Reinhardt Michel [phonetic] was an illustrator [unclear] children's book writer I translated. And Norma Farber, the widow of—well, she's dead now too—of whatever the big Farber Cancer Center is in New York. She was the wife of Dr. Farber. She wrote really good. It stood out, it jumped out. This is the thing, some really good authors just jumped out of the pile of manuscripts. Children's publishers get *so* many manuscripts, and they're inundated. And I was reading an awful lot of those at the time. I was helping editorially, and Helen would find editorial help for them, and screening. So a few manuscripts stood out. Norma Farber was good. She just was in a league by herself. She was an elderly woman—died in the meantime. And even one or two of our boys went to work in the storage room, lifting boxes, and helping with the design. Didn't one of our boys lay out their stationery?

HN: Yes.

SR: So this became a part—besides your working in academia, this sounds like this is a big part of your San Diego life.

PN: Big part. A big job. Yeah, I was translating books for them. I was translating, and I was writing for them. Helen and I did one little thing together. They did books called envelope books. They'd fit in an envelope. Very good idea. They cost three dollars or something like that. And *Dream Cats* was a collection of poetry we did about cats. And we would find out-of-copyright things we could illustrate them with, and we found verse for them. Did we do this one together?

HN: Yes.

PN: Yes. Okay. Helen, in fact, has an original poem—I do too probably. Yeah, I have a poem about cats, and Helen has a poem, a very nice poem. Is it anonymous in here?

HN: No.

PN: It may be. I don't see your name on it. Oh, there, anonymous, "unsigned" here. But Helen did some, and I did some cat poems. It was fun.

SR: That sounds like it enriched the whole San Diego experience.

PN: It enriched *our* lives, and the Darlings were wonderful people, really—they still are. The company goes on now under the name Green Elephant?

HN: Blue Lantern.

SR: Oh! They went from green to....

PN: To Blue Lantern, up in Seattle. They're thriving. They bought a ballet school property, or something like that. They sent, for Helen's birthday two months ago, a big carton of just beautiful of their new books.

SR: How wonderful!

PN: Some of the books are books we planned—one or two of them—that we planned at the time. He wanted a book, he had crazy ideas, and they were *wonderful*. *Dressed Rabbits*. Oh, you have one there? Is that *Dressed Rabbits*?

SR: Oh, yeah.

PN: That's a book I planned originally, if that's the.... The *Dressed Rabbits*. He wanted a book on rabbits with clothes on. And he wanted a job. So I looked. And I wrote verses for it, and that never developed. But I think there's a form of

it that just arrived. But this was one I really liked. It's a book I wrote for his envelope series called *Fenstermacher's Boulder*. And it's about people who lust for a big boulder in their neighbors' back yard, and they steal it, but then they give it back at the end. There had to be some degree of morality in things that Harold got. But what we did was find a good illustrator, Jeff Carnell [phonetic], for this. And I've looked him up, because I wanted him for other stories since, but he's deeply in some religious affair at the moment, so he wasn't very available.

SR: So was this over several years?

PN: Five years maybe.

HN: [unclear]

PN: [unclear] Harold and I—I did most of the labor on that—Harold facilitated and put his name on it. But this was a book, a collection of articles I got together, I solicited. I got people, I wrote the preface. It's called *Image Maker: An Annual Dedicated to the Consideration of Book Illustration*. They had the money to do.... They had high ladies tipping in pictures. "Tipping in" means pasting into the pages. So we get this high-cost affair. It's expensive. I got one of my students, Helen Borgun, to write an article on something or other in here. Did I write one? I'm not sure. But it's a collection of articles on book illustration. It was a good one. It's difficult to get material, and some good people—Perry Nolaman [phonetic] wrote an article about it, and he's a major figure. Anyway, that was a nice thing, *Image Maker*.

SR: Now, was this going on prior to the time that you met Edward Gorey, or the same time?

PN: After. Edward Gorey was wholly, totally in the time I was at Harvard and overlapping the Stoney Brook years. And then Stoney Brook, West Virginia, and then whenever San Diego State started, 1978, '79, about. So this was considerably after.

SR: So you've had a parallel—in addition to the teaching and the writing and all that—ongoing correspondence, collaboration, and involvement with illustrators.

PN: Constantly. Constantly. Among those people, way back then, Ashley Bryan [phonetic] lives in Maine. He's a wonderful person. He's a *very* imaginative artist. Do we have a collection of, a few pictures of Ashley? Ashley's a little older than I am now. He's probably in his mid to late eighties. He's a rich human being, and just full of beauty and joy.

SR: And clearly, you have formed these relationships that go on, and correspondence, rich correspondence with so many of these people.

PN: Yeah. I think I mentioned yesterday what I had read about Darwin's work. It's not scientific work, so I don't really, it's not that they fill in the blanks, they just fill in the life. Ashley's a black man who has a rich record of black history in illustration. You have a picture of Ashley here?

HN: A storyteller, a poet, a painter, a collector.

PN: He's a storyteller, a poet, joyous painter. This is Ashley, I guess. I can't see too well.

HN: Yes. We brought him to San Diego State and [unclear].

PN: Yeah, we'd bring some of these people to San Diego. It was a privilege mutually, all around. So among these people, Peter Sees is somewhat later, because Peter

Sees, that flourished, that correspondence, after we moved here. But Richard Kennedy, the man who wanted to land his plane in a third-grade classroom. And Reinhardt Michel was a German illustrator. There's a book of his here somewhere. It's in the other room still, I guess. In the meantime also, somebody asked me to do a *Phantom of the Opera* for children. So I did that. There was a fine illustrator, a commercial illustrator in ... what's Mormon country?

SR: Utah?

PN: Utah. In Utah, who raised horses, and is a very good illustrator. Oh, there are some of the books. That's Reinhardt Michel. He was in Germany, and he became a friend.

SR: And what is [unclear] and the something brother?

PN: And his brothers. That was a book he did about.... And I would translate these.

SR: That's charming.

PN: Let's see, *The Phantom of the Opera*, that was my doing. I translated that. That was a horrible novel, *Phantom of the Opera*, endless and tedious. But it turned out into a good children's story. Somebody told me—I think they're true—that's one of the easiest ways to really know what the plot is about, is to read the children's version, which had to clarify it. And then Quint—well, this happened a little later. Did it start in San Diego?

HN: Yes.

PN: Quint Buchholz, the *Sleep Well, Little Bear*, which is a beautiful little children's book. And *The Collector of Moments*, those are nice books, beautifully written. I translated those. Then Reinhardt Michel, Kristina Bjork. We were in touch for a

while with her. She's a fine Swedish illustrator. Michael Rosen. I added poems of his to things. Pat Lewis.

SR: Pat Lewis is another name?

PN: Pat Lewis is an American, *very*, very prolific poet. He didn't need translating. He submitted manuscripts to Green Tiger, so we got to know him very well. That's right, his poetry is okay, but his one manuscript just stood out. It was a beautiful manuscript—prose story, that he submitted as a children's book. I think it was published elsewhere. Green Tiger didn't take it, or it was slow.

HN: They were going to. Green Tiger folded.

PN: It folded or it moved or something happened. And Green Tiger was thriving for more than our time there. I mean, during our time, they closed up shop and went to Seattle. But in all the time there.... Well, Pat's was one of those manuscripts that was taken and then....

HN: Yes, I was working on it.

PN: Yeah, okay. And then it didn't.... Inga Lasse son Barish [phonetic], we met in Sweden. Tove Junsen was from that time.

HN: Astrid Lindgren.

PN: Yes, we met her, and it was very moving.

SR: And so this is all happening during years in San Diego?

PN: San Diego. It was a whole second....

SR: And so did these people come to your home?

HN: Yes. We entertained a lot.

SR: That must have been wonderful.

PN: Oh, yeah.

SR: So this was not just a working relationship, but it was a whole fuller relationship.

PN: A whole life. Ashley Bryan stayed with us. He stayed with us here, too,
[unclear]. Richard Kennedy, did he ever come? No, he never came down.

HN: Eleanor Cameron came a lot. Myra Cohen Livingston came a lot.

PN: You're right. Myra Livingston was sort of the mother of children's poetry
anthologies in.... She was a sort of seminal figure in collecting children's poetry.
She was a poet herself. She was a very skilled poet. She smoked herself to death,
I'm afraid.

HN: And Eleanor Cameron.

PN: Eleanor Cameron was a part of our life. Eleanor Cameron was just a major figure
in young people's intermediate age novels that were read mainly by girls. Very
good, very sensitive, very perceptive, very mature, subtle novels, with an awful
lot about second sight. She was interested in that sort of thing, much more than I
was. And she was *very* close to us, *very* close to us. And we have, as I say, a big
cardboard box of her letters downstairs.

SR: So was your home kind of the center for all these people?

PN: It became that, yeah.

SR: That's what I think I'm hearing.

PN: San Diego State, some students, like....

HN: Helen Borgun.

PN: Helen Borgun, Alide Allison [phonetic].

HN: Louise Strecker [phonetic].

PN: Louise Strecker, yeah.

HN: Gary.

PN: Gary not so much.

HN: [unclear]

PN: [unclear] was very close to me. I loved him. Then he died in the Sierra, just keeled over dead. He was one of my very good students. Then he went to work, typically. Yeah, he went to work first for Harcourt. It was sort of interesting, he was flying somewhere with Jovanovich, one of the owners of Harper Brace Jovanovich.

SR: Yeah, I remember the name.

PN: He was flying to a conference and he said to himself, “I’m doing a book on men’s face creams?! What the hell am I doing?!” And he went to law school.
(laughter) “What am I doing with my life?”

SR: That’s a good question!

PN: He became a hard-working attorney in San Diego, and remained a good friend.

SR: And what was his name?

PN: Gary Piepenbrink [phonetic], P-I-E-P.... I’ll see you later. He wrote me. We stayed in touch all the time. And he said, “One thing that would really be fun together would be to read Shakespeare’s sonnets together, go through them slow, read them with you, and we’ll just write about them and e-mail.” We’d do a course, sort of together, reading Shakespeare’s sonnets together. That was interesting too. It was *very* interesting to me. I thrilled to the prospect. And we got started with an exchange of letters. You know, one sonnet at a time, very

slowly, just go through them with care. It was a good experience. And we were just getting into that, when he died. (telephone rings, recording paused) Yeah, the house was teeming.

SR: So I'm getting a sense that it was the combination of what you were doing at the school, and then you were writing, and then having this whole social life. That's really....

PN: Yeah, it was rich. (recording paused)

SR: So I'm going to put it on. Among these different artists that you collaborated with, earlier on you mentioned Edward Gorey. And I would like to know how that began, and have you tell me a little bit about who introduced you and how and why.

PN: Okay. Well Gorey is certainly absolutely critical, the linchpin in the whole start of the connection with children's books. There wouldn't be any without Edward Gorey, because it started in the 1960s. I was doing children's books just for my own children, or just illustrating stories for them, that's all, and thinking no further of it. I was very specifically writing, probably under contract, a freshman English textbook at the time. And I think I was working for Addison Wesley.

SR: That's right, I read that.

PN: Yeah, I think so. And an editor from Addison Wesley, from their academic, from their textbook division, was at our house. And I had done a book—I think this is it—*Christopher's Leg*. Our middle son, Christopher, much beloved, had broken his leg at Cape Cod, hopping from rock to rock. And I think this is the book, this is the watercolors.

SR: It's beautiful, and they're your drawings. I see it in front of me.

PN: Well, I was just doing what I was doing naturally. I was always doing our Christmas cards. Christopher's leg was in a cast, and I was trying to entertain him by doing an illustrated book for him, a watercolor book. And this is the book. "Drinking broad, Christopher told all the admiring sailors how the pirate broke his leg." This was the watercolor book, and it was a very typical thing in our family that I would just get a watercolor pad and write and paint in it and do a children's book for whatever kid needed whatever comfort. Harry Stanton was the Addison Wesley editor, and he was at our house, and I was getting bourbon in the kitchen, as I recall it. And Harry Stanton was rummaging on my desk. This was in Medford, Massachusetts.

SR: So this was back during the Harvard years?

PN: During the beginning of the Harvard years, *early* in the Harvard years. He was rummaging on my desk, which he had no business doing, and I was getting bourbon. And when I came back, Harry said, "Let's forget about the textbook. Let's do children's books!" And I was delighted! Why not? I'd never thought of it. Harry was a very whimsical, very smart, very subtle man. He occurs a lot in the early Gorey-Neumeyer letters, he's referred to a lot. (recording paused) So Harry got it all started, and he was.... I wish I had it, I had it until recently, and somebody may have walked off with it. I had early, home-painted versions of *Donald and the dot, dot, dot*. I'd done that book myself in watercolor. I wish I had it still. And Harry, at that point, wanted to do my illustrations for the book. But as you can see, they may have been whimsical, but they were really not

professional. And cooler heads prevailed at Addison Wesley, and somebody said to Harry, “You know, there’s a fine artist at Doubleday who does book covers for Anchor Doubleday books,” which were popular in those days. I think Anchor still exists, but not that interestingly. In those days, Anchor books had *wonderful* covers.

SR: Uh-huh, I remember the name.

PN: Yeah. And I have some. I have Gorey’s actually, because I remember early on Gorey was at our house. Suddenly, in my mind, the two stories came together. Edward! Anchor book covers! Of course! And anyone that was sort of sexually ambiguous or spooky or something: Andre Ghee [phonetic] or Freud, and Hamlet, and that kind of thing, was suddenly—those were Gorey covers. That made sense. And suddenly I went to the shelf and I pulled off the ones—Andre Ghee or things that made sense, that Gorey would have done, and indeed he had done them. That was a terrific idea. But anyway, Gorey was enlisted to do the....

SR: How did you get together for the first time?

PN: Harry Stanton had a house in [unclear], and he had a sail boat. He invited.... “You two have got to get together,” he said. We hadn’t met at that point. “You two have got to meet each other, you’ll love each other.” And of course it was one of those things. We didn’t have a thing to say to each other. We went for this long sail, and we got back, and Gorey was stepping out of the sailboat onto the shore, or from a dingy, I guess—we took a dingy to the shore—and the dingy went out from the dock, and Gorey had one foot each place and he was being spread-eagled, and he fell between the two. I grabbed his arm, and then the dingy

took out, and I took off after the dingy. When I got back, Gorey was standing on the shore. His back looked like this, and I had pulled his arm out of its socket and dislocated his arm. He was standing there....

SR: What a beginning!

PN: What a beginning. And we got him to the Hyannis Hospital, and we sat and waited. And after a while—we waited and waited—and the place was full of sort of dowdy people. And Gorey after a while said, “You know, I think it’s popped back into place.” But he’d been signed in, and they wouldn’t let him out of the emergency room. So after a while, he went to the bathroom, and he came out with the blanket that had been wrapped around. He was cradling the blanket, and he said, “Nurse, I’ve handled it all by myself. Now can I go?” He was cradling it like a baby.

SR: Did the nurse appreciate the humor?

PN: No! And people were baffled, these sort of dowdy housewives and such. And no, she wouldn’t let him out. And so we stayed there, and in Harry’s car, the drawings had been there for *Donald*. And we fetched those, and we were in hysterics, they were so funny! I mean, they *were* funny. Donald brought something for the worm to eat, and he’s got this enormous lettuce.

SR: I *love* the drawings!

[END OF PART 2 of transcription, at minute 45:15 in second sound file. Go to new document for continuation.]

Professor Peter Neumeyer
April 12-14, 2010
interviewed by Susan Resnik
for San Diego State University
~6½ hours of recording total
PART 3 OF 3 PARTS

(continuing from previous document, second sound file, Min. 45:15)

PN: Those drawings were there, and we were in stitches, and people in the waiting room didn't know what the hell we were laughing at. And we just had a wonderful time. And finally they let Gorey out, and he was okay.

SR: So this was the first book with him, *Donald and the dot, dot, dot*?

PN: This was the first meeting with him, in the emergency room. And we had a good time, we got along. And that really started it. That started *it* in one sense, because it started a *wonderful* friendship, which is recorded in the letters.

SR: When did the letters start?

PN: It started then, really. Really, because we went to work on the book. We got a contract, and we went to work with each other, and Gorey was on Cape Cod, and then in New York, and we were in Medford, Massachusetts.

SR: Right. And there was no e-mail.

PN: There was no e-mail, and we both loved writing letters. We wrote long, intricate, personal letters to each other, so it was an epistolary friendship, really. And it was the start of my career in children's books. I'd never thought about children's books in my life.

SR: That's a wonderful story, just how that happened because he was rummaging on your desk, and saw what you did for your own children.

- PN: And over the course of the letters, we often discussed, fairly often, whether this had anything to do with children, at all. Or whether it was just things we wanted to say. And so that was the start of the friendship, and that was the start of a career in children's books.
- SR: It's very interesting. Now, the *Donald* books, there are two?
- PN: There are two *Donald* books, and there was a parallel series we've written about, and there are manuscripts for all of these. I mean, all of these things I've kept. And *Lionel*. Gorey raised the issue.... It's lying around here. He wondered what was the difference between Lionel and Donald. And he always raised that issue, he always wanted to know what was the difference between Lionel and Donald. And they were somewhat similar, but there was a lot of difference.
- SR: Well, I've seen the *Donald* books, I have not seen the *Lionel* books.
- PN: Lionel, I don't know, I took the.... I'll find it later. But Lionel goes to the dentist, and his father feels lecherous about the dentist's secretary or nurse. I don't know where I lost [unclear]. There's a little cut-out section.
- SR: We're going to look for the *Lionel* books soon.
- PN: We'll find it, because it's one of the best Gorey quotes in the collection.
- SR: And so in the process of doing all of these books, you would communicate back and forth by mail. Did you call each other as well, or visit?
- PN: Yup. Yeah. But business really got done by letter, really. He would visit occasionally, we'd work on things.
- SR: Did he do drawings in his letters at all? Or was it just words?

PN: Well, occasionally I would get one of his drafts for *Donald and His Mother*. I'll find it.

SR: I loved *Donald and the dot, dot, dot*.

PN: Yeah. And you know, I think a theme would often be ... my saying something like, "I don't see a hell of a lot of point in *Donald and the dot, dot, dot*. I don't think it's a story." And then Gorey writing back, somewhat profoundly, reassuringly, all the things he saw in it. (recording paused)

SR: So can I put it on again? Wait a minute, we're going to put it on again. Would you like to read it?

PN: Give me a minute. I think this is the key to Gorey. This is what I think reassured me with *Donald*, but it really is the key to Gorey, and it's in his letters. Quote, "The thing is, and here we come to Edward Gorey's"—it's all capitalized in Gorey-esque fashion—"GREAT SIMPLE THEORY ABOUT ART, which is, never try to communicate to anybody else until now. So prepare for Severe Bafflement," capital "S," capital "B"—"that on the surface, they"—that is, things—"are so obvious that ... on the surface they are so obviously those situations that it is very difficult to see that they really are about something else entirely. This is the theory, incidentally, that anything that is art, and it's the way I tell, is presumably about some certain thing, but is really always about something else. And it's no good having one without the other, because if you just have the something, it is boring. And if you just have the something else, it's irritating. I am sure there are dozens of reassuring little books that *Donald Has a Difficulty* appears to resemble. But the real point to me lies in its pointing out,

which no one I know of has ever pointed out, even just to be clever, before, that it is not the first, but the second step which costs. This is an oversimplification, but then, just as you might fear”—that’s my *Do Not Fear A Visit to the Dentist*, which is a Lionel story. “Just as *Do Not Fear*, one of the most endearing stories in the English language is really”—I’m following ending #2—“about inspiration. There’s for you. I’m getting somewhat sloshed on Dubonnet, and besides having someone to talk to is going to my head. Lionel presents a hideous illustration problem, I think. What a lot of parentheses I seem to get myself into. But why is Lionel not Donald? He isn’t! But I’ll be damned if I can figure out quite why.”

So we had these two series of stories going on at once. And everything in the world has two meanings: there’s the one, and there’s the other thing that it’s *really* about. And in that vein, why is Lionel not Donald? he can’t figure it out, I can’t figure it out, but this was Gorey’s encouragement about going on, about carrying on with *Donald and the dot, dot, dot*, which I didn’t think was about much of anything, but which Gorey invested with meaning beyond what I saw, which kept *him* enthusiastic about it. That’s interesting. It’s puzzling, it’s baffling, it’s more than I knew or more than I saw. And (long pause) it caused Gorey to build for himself a platform which I think took him in meaning beyond where I had been in these stories, which made more of these stories, really, than maybe I invested in them. That’s interesting.

SR: Well, the whole interaction and the correspondence are so interesting, because as I’m thinking of it, when you created *Donald and the dot, dot, dot*, had you drawn pictures at all before he drew pictures?

PN: For *Donald*?

SR: Yeah.

PN: Yes, I had. I wish to hell I hadn't lost it. It's somewhere. Or somebody walked off with it. In the last three years it disappeared. Yes, there was a whole *Donald and the dot, dot, dot*, illustrated by me. It existed, I had done it all.

SR: Because that would be interesting to see how he then took that, and the interplay of what his drawings brought.

PN: I'm not sure. I wish it was around somewhere. It would be valuable to have, for insight. I'm not sure he saw it. I did it, but I'm not sure he saw that version at all.

SR: Oh, that's very interesting. So he just went with what he read and what you talked about?

PN: Yes. And I saw, I looked at your notes yesterday that were lying here, and you asked somewhere whether he added anything to it.

SR: Yeah.

PN: Not a word. He never changed a word.

SR: Well, I became interested—and we'll get to that later—when I was reading about *Charlotte's Web* and you were discussing the person who illustrated that. And also, the role of the illustrator.

PN: Right. That's fascinating.

SR: It's very interesting.

PN: And it's very different. Garth Williams's role in *Charlotte's Web*, Garth was a strong-minded ego. And Gorey didn't assert Gorey at all in the illustrations. This was so interesting. But certain ideas were his, and certain very funny ones, such

as that ... well, we could go through the book. But there are things that were his genius that I hadn't thought of.

SR: Do you want to take a look at the book, and we can share that. That would be nice.

PN: Well, there are Gorey jokes here, that he didn't need to change a word for, that he just *did* as his genius came out. "Donald's Mother," the first page, I opened, "who was also very wise, made holes in the lid." And there's this sexy, slinky lady, and she looks *hazardous*. I mean, she's a scary lady!

SR: Yes.

PN: She has this mankiller thing around the house. And little jokes such as in the pictures of Donald sitting on his bed, "Donald watched his room that day, 'I have a new friend,'" and several pages later, "when he went to bed that night he was sad. 'I will find a better [unclear] tomorrow.'" Between that time and the former time, one slipper has disappeared. You know, a story.... This is really Gorey's genius, not mine. He has his own story between the lines.

SR: That's what I'm seeing.

PN: And he doesn't need to change a word. He doesn't need to change a word.

Within the words he can write his own story. That's genius.

SR: That's fascinating.

PN: That's genius. I mean, little things. This is the art of.... Well, there are several things, let me point them out. He doesn't need me. I mean, this is Gorey's genius. Donald constructed things, and this is what he constructs. I don't need to say anything, he just takes the text and runs with it. He sees what he sees here,

and he constructs this monument. Donald imagined things—that's all Gorey's work, that's not mine. This is what he imagines. Or, for instance, Donald....

Where am I? Well, all right, this father, this guy is on that....

SR: I noticed him.

PN: Yeah.

SR: And he's in the other book, too, about Donald, I believe. I was wondering about him.

PN: And you wonder who he is. Well, he's the man who brings the dragon home at the end. So he's this missing father, this missing seaman, who actually comes home at the end of the book.

SR: With the dragon.

PN: With the dragon, who first appears on the umbrella stand, at first. There it is, first. And then he appears at the end of the book. Well, here it is on the front page. So the beautiful symmetry of it, he appears at the end, triumphantly carrying the dragon. And well might you wonder, is there a father in the house, what is this strange vampy woman? Here it is, right here at the very beginning. And indeed, he *does* appear. I mean, there's stories within the story that are hidden. And you have to be a damned-good viewer of pictures.

SR: Well, I found that so interesting, because I began to see that.

PN: Right!

SR: Somebody who likes to look at *New Yorker* cartoons and try to figure things out....

PN: What's going on, yes. And *much* more goes on with Gorey infusing this story, than just me. My words are very simple. And Gorey infuses it, loads every— keeps his words, “load every rift with ore.” He does that. So it becomes an entirely different story, and he doesn't need to change a word, but he does it, he enriches the story.

SR: And so as your collaboration with him developed, it seems like you were pleased with what he was doing.

PN: I was enlightened by it. Sure!

SR: Let's look at another one.

PN: A lot of these are *his* jokes in *Donald Has a Difficulty*. I mean, what do you do? My text is pretty simple. “She told Donald to think of other things.” And I will admit, it's pretty nice to [unclear].

SR: I thought this was wonderful.

PN: Yeah! But all Gorey had to go with was “markets, battles, and strings.” And then he'd [unclear]. This is *wonderful*. He puts his beast in it.

SR: There.

PN: Then he's running under a suit of Japanese armor. Battles. And that he makes the battle a Japanese bow-and-arrow war. Medieval, Asian, Oriental battle axes, and this maze of strings. Gorey was inspired by this text. I mean, I can't take the credit for this. He just ran with it. It gave him the possibilities.

SR: It definitely did.

PN: But it really is Gorey's work.

SR: Did Gorey ever write children's books?

PN: Yes, he did. Sure. It depends a little bit on your definition. What's a children's book? He wrote *tons* of books. We have a cupboard full of Gorey-ana here. And these books called ... where are they here? (recording paused) The Gorey bibliography is big and long and contains numerous things. But it can be divided, subdivided into what Gorey did for himself on his own, which there's a great amount of material, and then there's Gorey as an illustrator for other people, which is another 50-100 items. I think my material might have a little bit of a special place within that, because we planned to go on forever. He wrote about that, and I wrote about that, clarified that in the introductions to the late editions of *Donald and the*, and *Donald Has a Difficulty*, that Gorey said, "Donald can go on forever, and we'll do hundreds of these." That was sort of the plan. Where that plan went, I don't know, it sort of evaporated. At one point in the early sixties, that was sort of what the plan was.

SR: So how long did your correspondence [continue] over the years?

PN: The hot center of the correspondence went on for about, oh, probably a year and a half, that's all. That's all. It lasted somewhat longer, but that was the main correspondence, the one that will be published. That's probably over a year. That took place within a year.

SR: And so there were two Donald books?

PN: There were just two Donald books, *Donald and the*, and *Donald Has a Difficulty*. And then there was *Why We Have Day and Night*, which was not Donald particularly.

SR: That was also marvelous.

PN: And those were the only books that got done. Then he went on to other things, and I went on to other things.

SR: And this was, as you said, in the early years at Harvard, for you?

PN: Well, that went on until we went to Stoney Brook. I don't know when *Donald* was first published, but it took a while until it was all written and illustrated. And by the time it's published, it didn't happen until I don't know when, 1969 or something like that. So the correspondence about it is earlier than the publication of it.

SR: Right. That's really such an interesting story, though, of how that even began, and how it continued. I know that you have had correspondence with so many people, and you have a theme of your interaction and collaboration with other illustrators, but did you feel that Gorey in some ways—and you called him “Ted,” because he was a friend, from what I recall.

PN: Ted, yeah.

SR: Was he really unusual?

PN: It was an intense friendship. I don't know why, or exactly how—I've never figured it out. But we wrote each other an awful lot in a very short period of time. Well, assuming—I haven't looked it up—but assuming the letters span a period of ... two years, maybe, at most, there's 250 pages of them. So it was intense, it was a lot of writing. It was a form congenial to both of us. It was the way we wanted to be in touch at that point. I don't know, I've had a lot of correspondence, intense correspondence, with a fair number of people. But that may have been the most concentrated. (recording paused)

Well, I think what happened was Gorey's life went on, with Gorey at the center of Gorey's life; and ours was scattered and diffuse, and went on, touching many different worlds, and it lost the focus that it had for a while on Gorey—which was irreplaceable, in my estimation, and was *very* warm and very loving, and will always mean a great deal to me. It was wonderful!

SR: As we proceed, I think that we should discuss another *major* important portion of your work, which involved writing the annotated version of *Charlotte's Web*. And as I mentioned to you, discussing it with a young friend of mine recently on a trip to Belize, we took the annotated version with us, and I told her that we were going to be talking about it, and I asked her if she wanted to think of any questions that *she* might ask, and she said yes. She said, "What is an annotated version? And had you done any others before? And how did you decide to do this one?"

PN: Those are good questions, superb questions. No, to answer the first one, I hadn't done any other annotations before. There is precedent, though. There are other people who have done good annotated things, and it's become quite a fashionable thing to do, but there weren't that many at the time I did that. There are two examples I was aware of. There are two people who had done annotateds. One was Martin Gardner, at Harvard, did an annotated *Alice in Wonderland*, which has gone through many editions, each one a little better than the last. *Alice in Wonderland*, as you can imagine, takes an awful lot of annotation, because throughout the game there is an analogue to a specific chess game throughout the game. It's a highly mathematical book. Lewis Carroll was a mathematics

[scholar?] at Oxford, and mathematics and infinity and mathematical impossibilities were very much on his mind. So without digressing any further into that, that was a fine exhaustive example, done by a very.... Martin Gardner is a very smart, good man.

And the other example I was aware of is Baring-Gould's annotated nursery rhymes. I'm not sure if it's Mother Goose or nursery rhymes, but I had had that in my library anyway. But actually, I didn't really think about those when I started on this. I'll pass along a piece I wrote for a magazine not long ago, on how I got started with children's books, what I read, and so on. But I had read very little until I had children of my own. I read adult books, or looked at pictures. I'm not sure I had ever read.... The only children's books I knew, really—mainly, most of the ones I knew, except what I read for the class at Harvard—were the ones I was reading with my own children, which was at that same time. And I don't remember when I first read *Charlotte's Web*. But what happened was—and this is not a very inspiring story, but I want to be halfway truthful in this interview—one of my sons, Zack, was graduating from Cornell, and I wanted to get to Cornell for the graduation, and, if I could, cut expenses on the trip to the minimum. So I looked up—I'm good at library research, and I looked up what famous author's papers were at Cornell. That's really a very backward way to do your research. There was a lot of James Joyce at Cornell, and I didn't want to involve myself in James Joyce. And there was the papers of E.B. White, who had gone to Cornell and given all his papers. So maybe—I don't remember—maybe or maybe not I had read *Charlotte's Web*. But anyway, I

applied for a grant to work on the papers of E.B. White, and I don't remember in exact detail how this worked out, but I did get the grant, and we did go to Cornell. We went to Zack's graduation, and we spent ten days at Cornell while I worked in the library, very hard, on E.B. White's papers, which are just fascinating to read. In those days—maybe it's still there—there was a card catalog, a whole big card catalog, maybe fifty drawers of E.B. White papers catalogued there. And what you did—I've given this as a slide show at San Diego State—it's sort of amusing. There's a special collections reading room, and you're not allowed to bring in any ink, and you write out on cards what manuscripts [unclear] or what manuscripts you want to see. And you have to be specific, you can't rummage on shelves. They did show me the safe room, where in pretty satin-covered blue boxes, were all E.B. White's papers. And I cheated a little, sometimes I wrote "correspondence with..." I don't know, "John Kennedy," or things like that. But I really just wanted to peek at. But essentially I got the eight or eleven—you say eight....

SR: I think I read "eight."

PN: That may be. It really depends how you count, what you count as a manuscript. There are at least eight *pretty* complete manuscripts of the draft. And it makes a wonderful whole series of classes to go through, say, just the first page—the evolution of Page 1, and what changes in that. And so you'd sit in that room, and people would bring you what you ordered, and in pencil you could take notes, and you could make notes of what you wanted Xeroxed. You could take little excursions to other topics, but essentially I kept my mind on the job and worked

as hard as I could on elucidating, doing it sort of a talmudic reading of annotating, “A,” the material that was there. You could go through the manuscript drafts and point out how whatever.... One of his early starts, “Wilbur was a beautiful pink pig. But there’s not much point in talking about Wilbur until we talk about the barn he lived in.” And then he goes on a long description about the barn. And then “Charlotte was a big gray spider”—Version 3—“big gray spider. She lived in a corner of a barn. In that same barn....” And he doesn’t know how to get everything into the first paragraph, how to get all the characters into that. Several beginnings about the barn only, describing the barn. Barns are much on White’s mind. He had a barn when he grew up. And incidentally too, a parenthesis. There was an English professor at Cornell at the time, Scott Elledge, who taught Milton, 17th century scholar, who also was a neighbor and friend of White’s in Maine. He had a summer house on the shore in Maine. And Scott Elledge wrote a biography of E.B. White, or *the best* biography, maybe the only one, of E.B. White. I forgot how or why Elledge knew I was there doing this. I’m sure I wrote him a note that I was coming. And he was *so* nice to me. He was *so* generous. He took me to a concert at Cornell. We had a lovely time together.

Another little side story: He was just such a warm host, and forthcoming with material, and I’d correspond with him occasionally. I think he wrote a review of *The Annotated Charlotte’s Web* somewhere, and then about maybe six, seven years ago.... You don’t see it necessarily glancing through *The Annotated Charlotte’s Web*, but you do if you study it and work hard with it—there’s an awful lot of things wrong with it. There are a lot of things, whether they’re

matters of layout, of color, of the wrong number in the margin, matched up with the wrong number in the text—that kind of thing that generally only the author notices. They just bother the hell out of me. I’ve always wanted, I *begged* Harper Collins, the publisher—who were hell to work with—to let me work on another edition, update it, correct the errors. People would write me letters, too, saying, “Oh, you didn’t think of this,” and “I know where Lurvy got his name.” When White was working on a steamboat in Alaska, there was a seaman named Lurvy. All these things sort of come in after you’ve written the book. And I wanted to put them all in. I’d collected them, of course, from Day One. And I got a phone call about six years ago, “We’re doing another edition. Can you...?” My God, I was in heaven! I got nineteen pages of corrections, and I was ecstatic. And then, of course, I got the typical Harper phone call, “We don’t have money for this, we can’t do it.” So they’ve been reprinting, and this old edition of mine—I don’t know about yours—this edition of mine, my notes in the margin are green. In the paperback later, they’re probably the same color, they’re black.

SR: Let me see. They’re green.

PN: They’re green. Good. Okay. In the later printing they decided to save on the color printing, and they made everything black, which makes it much.... So those are things that your average audience doesn’t particularly complain about.

SR: In fact, I remember liking that they were different.

PN: Yeah. And I think this green was my choice of color, too. I thought it went the best.

SR: It’s perfect. It fits.

PN: Yeah, that sort of bucolic color.

SR: Yes. Well let me just get back to the whole idea of what an annotated version is.

PN: Thank you! Good! I'm so glad you're here to keep me on track! Well, as you remind me, I saw my function as being sort of a tour guide through the text. I could begin close-up with the enormous benefit I had, in having the eight or however many drafts in front of me, so I could take somebody through the manuscript drafts successively, as they changed. And I could, as a professional reader of texts, I could try to rationalize why he made the changes he did. That's sort of my role. And there is a wonderful example I don't want the session to close without my calling attention to eventually, which is a prime example of that. So first of all, to take the reader through the text, what is actually on White's manuscript, which the reader doesn't have in front of him? That's why you go to a library, to see manuscripts. Working with manuscripts is unlike any other job, and I love it. It's no literary criticism, it's just being very careful—careful at tracking and recording what it is you see in front of your face. Secondly, I would—White, as the annotated makes clear—studied spiders *very*, very carefully, to do this, and had a correspondence—which is at Cornell—with various people at the Natural History Museum, and the Smithsonian. And that correspondence is there. So I could just take, as a subject, White and his work on spiders, and elucidate on that, and show the sketches. In the manuscripts there are drawings with vectors of which way the spider would head, weaving its web. I've forgot what page that's on.

SR: I remember seeing some of this, yeah.

PN: Those are in the book. He checked that out very carefully.

SR: I found the parts that you explained about the spider, fascinating; and the name.

What is it, Cabatika [Cah-bah-*tika*]?

PN: Cabatika [Cah-*bah*-ti-ka]. The name of that spider is now—that's a feminine Latin ending, and it's now been changed, for reasons I don't know, to (in Latin) _____ Cabatikus, which is a masculine ending. I don't know why, but the name of White's orb-weaving—it's an orb-weaving kind of spider, that's a specific kind, and that's its specific species identification. I sort of traced White's steps with that. He would have wonderful sheets of questions, like "How long does it take for an egg to hatch?" Fifty days, or whatever he said. "How many babies are born at once?" And then in a different lead, darkness in his pencils, one would be a #2 pencil, then he might answer his questions at another time with a #3 pencil, so you could tell when—he must have been on the phone to somebody, and writing down answers to all his questions with a different pencil. So you can track the sequence of when he does all this, and how he does it. Sometimes he cheats. There's a question something like "How many babies are born at once?" and he'll write "yes." So that's Number Two, the spider lore.

And when Helen and I went to visit White's house, we did go up—that's another story, another time—we did see what might be the original Charlotte's home in a corner of the porch there. It was a spider domicile.

Then stylistic commentary, the third, would be sort of commentary. Well, there are things that are unique to E.B. White. He loves making lists, lists of the kinds of trash in garbage behind the home plate.

SR: Yes, specifics.

PN: Specific. And those go on and on and on. Or when he describes at one point the rain coming down. And the rain came down on this, and the rain came down on that, and the rain comes down, and it rains endlessly throughout that paragraph—never ceases. And so, you know, you read a normal every-day life, and you don't really stop to chew on a piece like that. But it's so crafted and so carefully done that.... It's like going through a very special garden: if somebody points it out to you, you become aware of it, but if nobody points it out to you, you might well miss it. So the book is so.... It's really crafted. It's not written off the top of the head.

SR: I found it fascinating, starting at the beginning where—and I want to ask you about this—where you explain the names, each name, whether it's Arable, which means “plowable” or something?

PN: Yes, it does.

SR: And Fern, and how all the names are so carefully selected. Is that a common thing among authors?

PN: It *is* common, absolutely. I think so. Watch a television series, and the wise man, or the beautiful girl. The beautiful girl is not going to be named Nora. People don't get.... You know, human gestation is nine months, and novelists might be much longer than that. And you don't name your children lightly. I mean, the names are pregnant. Just as a novelist, you want to make sure that your characters don't get mixed up with each other, that you don't have a “Tom” and a “Tim.” You want people have an easy—because readability is a big factor on the road to

salability. Well, Dickens is the great example, but he's so obvious. The nasty, demanding schoolmaster is Mr. Gradgrind. Modern novels aren't *that* obvious, but you want to name your children with care, so that you suggest.... You don't want your tough-guy detective to be named Lloyd, L-L-O-Y-D. That's just sort of lame for a guy whose name ought to be Bruce. So Fern and.... Obviously, a very literate E.B. White. Fern? I'm really speculating, I'm out on a limb with why he gave her the name Fern, but it seems nicely agricultural and primordial. But Arable is perfectly clear. You have the world to choose from, and so these are the quintessential and bucolic prototypes. So there's Arable. I don't know, you can make up your own stories about the others: the ranch hand named Lurvy. And Homer Zuckerman, I don't know, I played around with that.

SR: The only thing I came across was that apparently—wasn't there somebody named Zuckerman either at *The New Yorker* or somewhere that he dealt with?

PN: That's true. It could be, could easily be. But I don't really know.

SR: I made a note of that, actually. I don't know where I put it. That was one of my questions, whether that's where he got Zuckerman.

PN: I don't know. I ... don't ... know. The only thing in that vein that I *could* say is that White, himself, was *terribly* private. He was a really uptight New Englander, and he was *terribly* solicitous of other people's privacy. He was tight, emotionally and.... I say this partly on the basis of business letters I got from him, permission to do this or that. He would just keep a very tight rein, so that nobody else would be impinged on in any way. And one of the great books, wonderful book to read, *very* entertaining, is *The Collected Letters of E.B. White*.

It's out in paperback. You get a *marvelous* sense of White, his hypochondria, his hatred of rats.

SR: Oh, the hatred of rats interested me.

PN: Yeah, throughout! He plinks at rats when he's a little boy in the family.

SR: But he liked mice.

PN: Yeah, he likes mice. And he wrote a poem about a spider to his wife, to Catherine. Catherine White was a fiction editor for *The New Yorker*—famous, famous one.

SR: And from what I read, that you had in there, working for a man named Ross.

PN: Yes, Harold Ross. There are biographies, a couple of them, of Harold Ross. He founded *The New Yorker*, and ran it as a monarchy, and had a wonderful sense for quality and taste, and was very eccentric and explosive. My favorite E.B. White book, really, is *Stuart Little*. The opening sentence of *Stuart Little*—Stuart Little is a mouse about three inches big. Well, he's not a mouse, as White often said. He's a little boy who *looks* like a mouse, but he's not a mouse. And the opening sentence is more or less like, "One day Mr. and Mrs. Frederick C. Little had a child who looked in every respect like a mouse."

SR: Yes, I remember that.

PN: And Ross *burst* into.... All hell broke loose afterwards, with that opening. But Ross burst into White's office and said (shouting), "God damn it, White, at least you could have had him adopted!" (laughter) Because this monstrous mouse-creature, born to Mr. and Mrs. Frederick C. Little.... Although there are lots of stories about that one time White recounts that he got a letter from somebody in

New York, I think, whose name was Stuart Little. He said, “Dear Mr. White, I’m going to get a rat, and I’m going to name it E.B. White!” But anyway, White leads to digression.

A third thing is.... I guess I was on stylistic commentary. And 4 is my catch-all, general cultural commentary. Oh, you were asking about the names. But yes, names are wonderful and rich, and yes, it’s a perfectly normal novelistic thing to do. Take great care how you name your children.

The general cultural commentary is that’s, in a way, the real potential of the book, what you could do with it. White calls it a hymn of praise, a paean to the barn. A paean is a Greek hymn of praise. And so what can you do? You can look back and see what White has read in the way of Greek literature that leads him to this kind of an expression. He calls it a story of birth, rebirth, salvation. You take it out to those farthest reaches of interpretation that you can.

SR: I believe you also said it’s a book very much about friendship (PN: Yes.) and death.

PN: Death, absolutely. So then you can, with that kind of thing, with death, you can, first of all, collect all the nasty letters that tell Mr. White he ought not to be writing for children about death. And then you can collect the reviews that are grateful for *finally* somebody is writing clearly and directly about death, in ways that children can grasp. And you can talk about American cultural context.

SR: Who is the primary audience for reading an annotated version? Who is the annotated version for?

PN: Who's the audience? I spoke yesterday—you've spoken a little bit about reading it with a ten-year-old, and I yesterday mentioned teaching.... (recording paused) Well, a natural audience is teachers, and people who were really fans of the book, of which there are a great many. The book sold pretty well. But you talked about Alex reading it with pleasure with you. And I mentioned yesterday, reading "King Lear" with seventh-graders, and bringing in the Shakespeare variorum, which is three-quarters of a page of critical commentary on each line. Kids are sold short. Kids, it's wonderful, it's wonderful, you can talk about all kinds of things. You can look at the sentence about the rain coming down, and the rain doing this, and you can count what kind of garbage and trash there is behind the goal on the playground, and why he didn't write "dog poop" also, or something like that. There's so many things to talk about.

SR: I agree.

PN: And kids that are perfectly within the [unclear] of children. So I think children, judiciously and in small doses, can.... This is the whole.... I don't want to go back that far, but the whole rationale for teaching literature is, as with anything else, zoology or whatever, that there is so much to see and appreciate in life, and the more you know what sort of thing you're looking for in life, the more you see. I mean, if you know how a basketball defense develops, that game is suddenly much more exciting to you than if you just see people running up and down the court, and so there's more to appreciate. And I think that was often, especially in the early years, I wondered, I questioned, "Is what I'm doing of any use to anybody? Other people are building bridges and settling lawsuits and healing

people, and I'm talking about a poem about a flea by John Dunn. Is this an utter waste of life?" If you enrich people's lives—and I must say in later years when.... We were talking earlier about the changing nature of students, different kinds of students in universities today, and colleges. One of the phenomena in later years that I really became so aware, or appreciated in that sense, was ... there were a lot of older, often women, coming back to school, filling-in the what had often been bleak periods of their lives, with riches wherever they could find them, and making so much of it.

SR: That's right.

PN: They were so appreciative. So if you can brighten people's lives that way, I think this can.... And children, on just little bits of that, children absorb such strange corners of it. I've forgotten what.... So then—I don't know where it fits in my schedule—but there are.... Annotated can also work on two other levels. All of White's correspondence with other people—people writing to him, he reaching out to other people. And also, well, I've touched on this already, how it fits into the whole culture of, say, the culture of children's books, or the culture of the novel in America. Hemingway said all of American literature derives from one book written by Mr. Mark Twain, and that's *Huckleberry Finn*. Well, you look back from E.B. White, who is noted as a, quote, "prose stylist," and you look with care at, thinking of that, of the way he structures—because he's *very* funny—the way he structures a sentence, so that in writing people, too, in his correspondence, he'll write to his editor, Ursula Nordstrom, "I've got hay fever, I've got sore hips, I've got bad feet. How are you?" And he has this rhythm of a sentence going on

and on, and then he'll flip at the end. I've noticed, I think, that my colleague Jerry Griswold, who is a considerable reader of Mark Twain, has adopted some of that style. Maybe I have too a little bit sometimes, because it's so useful and it's so funny. And it doesn't come naturally, it's very much crafted, so that.... For instance, one thing—it's impossible to do it really orally, but I can point to it.

SR: Okay.

PN: E.B. White and Catherine White's handwriting, his wife, became more alike as the years went on. And she was, in a way, his domestic editor. And sometimes I couldn't tell who had written what. I wrote White a note on the galleys that he had been correcting. Then he answered me. I'm reading the second paragraph. Well, I'm reading at the beginning. "The page edit KSW notes on the galleys is in the handwriting of my wife. I presumably asked her to look at the proofs," and so on. "The other two pages are in my handwriting, just a worried little old author talking to himself in an attempt to remove some bugs from his opus." Okay, that's a typewritten letter to me, from 1984. "Just a worried little old author, talking to himself in an attempt to remove some bugs from his opus." On Page 144, I found in the Cornell Library, a draft of that letter. This was a little note to me, and here was a draft. And the draft, it's on Page 144, on the left-hand column."

SR: Let's see if I have it in this version. 144? I'm going to look.

PN: I found a typed rough draft of this same note White had read to me, "in an attempt to get some bugs out of his creation." He crosses out "get," writes "remove."

SR: Yes, I see that.

PN: [unclear] bugs ...

SR: ... “out of,” and [he] put “from.”

PN: ... “out of,” “‘from,’ his creation.” Why is “creation” then, in the version I got, changed to “opus”?

SR: And before it was “creation,” according to this, it was “narration.”

PN: It was “narration, creation.” Yeah. What you can do then, you can speculate why would he.... He does this with a hasty little note. My theory is White was shy and anxious, and he was very self-deprecating. To me this is just fascinating. He was very.... The self-deprecation was a very protective device. It’s like the little child standing in front of the class and saying, “I just wrote this little poem and you won’t really like it, but this is how it goes.” And he wants to not say, “my work.” He doesn’t want to say “my novel.” That may not be a novel, since it’s a children’s book. So what does he do? “My narration” is meaningless. “My creation”? That’s grandiose. This is not a creation. All right. How about “opus” is grandiose, but self-mockingly. You know, it’s for a Mozart piece or something like that. And it’s protective in a way which one can see more easily, because he does it so often. He uses the same psychological device so often.

SR: Yeah. And you said that here. And what you’re explaining now is what you have written in this annotated version, and that’s what’s so wonderful, to read that, and how you illuminate what may have been going on, and that’s fascinating.

PN: Well, that was the job of close reading, really, a talmudic job.

SR: I love it.

PN: But at the same time, I have to say, protectively, look at the epigraph on the very first page. I'll read it. When he read my draft of this, he said, "extraordinary document any way you look at it," which is pretty funny. And it makes me realize how lucky I was when I was writing the book that I didn't know what in the hell was going on. So some of my speculations may be just baloney here, too. And you have to take them with your own good judgment whether Neumeyer's going too far with "Fern." And it happens, in fact, as you look through the annotated, the notes get sparser and sparser. So by the time you get to, say, Page 150, 151....

SR: Uh-huh, there's one note on 151.

PN: Yeah, but that time I've had to spread the notes, and by Page 150, I've said most everything, and there's less to say now, and I'm really digging. And this is sort of interesting—I mean, later some pages get rich again, but it gets a little sparser. Two years ago, two different people have done annotated—it's quite a fad, doing annotateds now—two people have done annotated *Wind in the Willows*—Kenneth Graham's *Wind in the Willows*. Gorgeous, gorgeous book. It's one of my favorite books. I don't know whether children like it, but it's just one of those novels. And two people have done annotated *Wind in the Willows*, and I noticed the same phenomenon in both of them—they ran out of things to say halfway through the text. I just feel with them, I know exactly what they're going through. They've explained the names already.

SR: But also, I read this several times, because I kept thinking about different things like—things I’m interested in is the particular choice of the particular words that Charlotte wove in the web.

PN: That’s a *good* issue. That’s a wonderful....

SR: I love the way they sent the rat to get the newspaper, so that they could figure out what to write.

PN: Yeah. And I think the word “humble” is just a stroke of genius, because it’s so nonsensical. I mean, he isn’t humble, and it’s just the last word you would think of in this context. It’s so.... I mean, whatever the other words were....

SR: “Radiant.”

PN: “Terrific,” “radiant.” It’s funny!

SR: I loved “radiant.”

PN: And there he is in the archives, there’s a sheet of paper with all kinds of words—well, I think I reproduced it here—that he tried out, and ones he crossed out. But “humble” is just so off base. Another thing that comes to mind is, how much.... And this is part of the commentary, Group Comments #4, how much the larger issues of the book were on White’s mind. I put in here this beautiful essay called “Death of a Pig,” in which he—[unclear] “Death of a Pig,” 228—in which he’s wondering about the morality of going to feed a pig that he becomes acquainted with, that trusts him, and then to murder it afterwards. “Murder” reminds me of that early page where Fern’s father says, “I’m going to do away with....” “Do away?!’ says Fern. You mean murder or kill!” or whatever. And that leads me into a little riff about cleansing language, “final solution” and things like that.

SR: Which is a whole fascinating topic.

PN: Yeah. Then.... I'm just sort of skipping around, hit or miss. A fascinating aspect of working on this was writing the illustrator, Garth Williams.

SR: Yes. I mentioned earlier, it's rare for authors and illustrators, usually, in modern American publishing, to be in [touch]. Lewis Carroll and Tennille, the illustrator of *Alice*, were much in touch with each other. Historically, that's not so strange, but in modern American mass-produced publishing, that's not done. But editors at Harper were so in awe of E.B. White, and they treated him with such kid gloves, and they had such a valuable property that they were nurturing, that I would find notes from his editor, Ursula Nordstrom, to some editorial assistant or something, that were clearly not meant to ever be seen by White's eyes. There's this back room sort of stuff going on, to keep him comfortable, and whatever arrangements or problems there were with Garth Williams. And there were a lot of problems. Garth Williams was difficult to work with. He had his problems. He often needed money, and he often needed advances, and he was often late, and had a hard time with deadlines. I've just forgotten the story. I remember there was early correspondence with who should illustrate the book. It's in the annotated, but I've forgotten who. Shepard was named, the illustrator of *Winnie the Pooh*, and all sorts of people. And then they got Garth, who was reasonably well-known as an illustrator, had done his own children's books, was certainly good, was a good sculptor, I think, and was a man of note. And one of the things that was amusing and fun, and I'm just not prepared, I haven't re-read it, but the heart of it is in this book. I wrote Garth Williams, and he wrote me back what it

was like working with White, what it was like working on this book. And it is in the book—not the complete letters, but a large section of Garth’s.... Let’s see.... Garth Williams, 197.

SR: Okay, Appendix A. Huh!

PN: On Page 200. I won’t read it, but this is Page 5 and 6 from *long* letters that he wrote me. “*Charlotte’s Web* came after I’d illustrated many other.... It was most welcome. *Stuart* was more interesting to illustrate, as it was crazier. A little girl the size of Stuart, an invisible car racing around the dentist’s office,” and so on.

SR: Yeah, he says, “*Charlotte* required me to make the people, with the exception of Fern, very ordinary indeed. The animals had to be very real. The sole peculiarity that they talk to themselves and to some people.” It’s interesting, I guess, with him as the illustrator, but also one of the things I found interesting in your annotations was about the voices of the animals, and how they each have their very special voice. The geese repeated.

PN: Yeah, “gobble, gobble, gobble.” Yeah. Well, you’ve got to make your characters talk different from each other.

SR: I thought that was so interesting.

PN: And you and I talk very differently, and have our typical repertoire of associations. In “*Romeo and Juliet*,” Juliet’s nurse has logorrhea, she can’t shut up, and she just talks on and on and on, nonsensical little stuff that an old nursemaid might have on her mind.

SR: Yeah. I remember discussing this with Alex, and what fun it would be to just take it further and say, “What else would the goose say?” There’s so many things you *can* do with children, with this.

PN: Yeah. Yes, [right on?].

SR: To understand different personalities and voices.

PN: Sure.

SR: And Charlotte had a very thin voice, as I recall.

PN: Yes. That helps make her character. She was sort of razor blade slicey—she doesn’t mince words, when she talks about death, or how she kills somebody. And Wilbur is very taken aback. He’s sort of generous and sloppy and sentimental. Charlotte is not sentimental at all.

SR: Right.

PN: And it makes her sharp, edgy personality—awful word, “edgy,” it’s overused—but she is.

SR: There’s just so much.

PN: Endless stuff.

SR: But you have been a tour guide and an illuminator with this. It’s been a treat for me to read it, and reread it, and to share it with a ten-year-old, because that was fun.

PN: That’s the ideal way to do it, isn’t it?

PN: Yeah! It’s really been marvelous. This is just *one* of so many things that you have done. And all the while, you have this wonderful, rich marriage and family, and maybe you’d like to talk a little bit about your family.

PN: I'd love to! Would it be okay if Helen chimes in a little on this?

SR: Absolutely. (recording paused)

PN: After we retired and moved to Kensington, one of the last big projects here was I had, years before, interviewed Margot Zemach, with a tape that I had forgotten to turn on, for a magazine or a journal article. She was a very sweet lady. She was a superb children's illustrator, lived in Berkeley, and did a lot of illustrations for a lot of folktale-like things: sometimes with a heavy Yiddish sort of background. Many of the stories were told originally by her husband, and she would illustrate them. And her husband then died very young, and was an emotional disaster, and she carried on then. She became, very quickly, a very good writer herself, and had three girls, who lived in Berkeley, and was great fun to visit. [She] lived in a somewhat chaotic and wonderfully rich and artistic and creative house. I guess that became.... I don't know if I published an article with that or not. I may have. So then I got a call from Nick Clark, who was curator of the Eric Carle Museum, which is a big children's illustration museum in Amherst. Beautiful place. Endowed by ... what's his name?

HN: Eric.

PN: Eric Carle. Well, actually I got a call, would I get together and curate an exhibit of Nancy Burkert's, children's illustration? And Nancy's work was so diffuse, I was so busy then, and the work was so diffuse, and its cultural reach was so broad, I just didn't feel at that point I could encompass her work, and so I said, "No, but call me the next time." And the next time he called and said, "How about Margot Zemach, could you curate an exhibit of her work?" Her daughter—

I guess she wasn't then living in Berkeley, but she was from Berkeley. And all Margot's paintings and work and illustration were in storage here. So I said we could do that together, Helen and I. Helen is absolutely wonderful at doing that part I do the least well, which is anything logistical, getting things in the right order, in the right sequence, and so on. So we signed up for this together, and Margot's very nice [daughter].... One daughter lived here in Berkeley, but the daughter who's sort of in charge of everything.... What's her name?

HN: Kaethe.

PN: Kaethe, K-A-E-T-H-E, was here a good deal. Helen and I spent time at the art warehouse where all this stuff was stored, with a lot of other artists' paintings and things—it was a new experience to both of us—and came home with a Volvo full of paintings, and worked hard laying out the show downstairs in the library floor, and fiddling with various constellations of paintings that would make sense, roughly in chronological sequence. And it was to be a show, actually, mother and daughter, because Kaethe is also a children's book illustrator, and not yet up to her mother's excellence, but certainly very talented, empathetic, and awfully good to work with, and a sweet person. So we had mother and daughter pictures downstairs, and tried to make various kinds of sense of them, in different sequences. And I wrote the article that was the introduction to the show, for the catalog. And we had lots of other adventures en route with.... Was that Michael de Capua, (HN: Uh-huh.) the editor, who was one of *the* great people still alive, of the golden age of children's books in this country. Then we went to Amherst, and our show. It was really a very joint production. Helen and I really arranged

this very much together. Looked good on the wall, it was fine, it made sense. My introduction is okay, I'm pleased with it. It introduces Margot well, and we had a good time, and it was sort of a collaboration, as was the raising of three great sons, which I hope Helen can join me in talking briefly about.

HN: Oh, I'd be glad to!

PN: So there we are. You woke up this morning and thought of two primary points, and put them neatly and succinctly about them.

HN: Oh, well, I did. I thought these three boys....

PN: Named Chris, Zack, Dan.

HN: Zachary, Christopher, and Daniel—Zack, Chris, and Dan—have the same qualities that my father had, and in some ways your father, and that you and I exemplified, and that was a necessity to do the best one could do in life. In our day, it was to drive toward one goal, because when you went to work you usually started low and climbed the ladder and reached whatever level that you wanted to or could. But our boys, though they haven't gone in the same direction, they have moved forward, doing the best they can do. So I was proud of them, that they lived up to the examples of their grandfathers and their parents. And I also realized that they had had before them, examples of strong marriages, from both grandparents. In their way, each of them has a very different, but a strong, good marriage. And that makes me happy.

Also, I realized that the kind of household we had, which was full of people coming and going, creative people, building houses, or drawing pictures, or writing books, or carving knives, whatever they did, the children were always

involved. When the yurt builder came and build a yurt at Harvard, Dan was right there, and became almost an apprentice to him. I can think of many examples, but that kind of artistic ferment around them, even though we weren't major artists, we encouraged making Christmas cards, and making your own birthday gifts, and building Christmas plays out of a Bible story, and then making costumes, and having it with another family, and making the music for it. This kind of activity went on, so that those boys, going out in their different directions, are continuing in some of the same directions. And I just pulled out a little book that pleased us both, which Christopher brought. Christopher came from Taiwan, with his daughter Emily, last year, and said, "Could we write a book?" and sat Peter down with Emily, and Peter helped Emily write a story, and they illustrated it, and it's become a very nice little book, which is in the tradition of Neumeyer households.

PN: Thank you! Great! What can I say? I love these boys dearly. I wish they'd shape up. (laughter) No, they're great. They all have found a path. Each of them has found a path. I just admire how they cope with a world that's so different from the one that seems to straightforward and regular in our day. Zack is the oldest, and he had a full career. He founded or co-founded a hotel management company, which did beautifully just as long as the economy held up somewhat, and saw it through many, many successful years. And now that he's retired, he's devoted himself *acidulously* and full-spiritedly to public education in Colorado. He volunteers his time, has done this for years, at the moment helping Colorado get to Arnie Duncan's federal funds for education. And Colorado, I

think in *some* measure thanks to Zack, is pretty much in the running at the moment. And he has a nice wife.

SR: What is her name?

PN: Amy. And two sons, Max, whom I talked to on the phone a long time last night, and who was a volunteer in the office of Senator Bennett in Washington a couple of months ago, and is now hoping next week he'll hear from Teach For America. And Joseph, who is doing just splendidly in school with top subjects I could never master, and who's great fun to talk with and be with, and whom I hope over the years we get to know much better.

And middle son Chris has a wonderful wife, Gina, and their daughter Emily, who is now six, and who is marvelous to read books with, and to write books with, and who is graceful and beautiful, and the first girl in memory in this family to have ever been born into this family, which is very special to me.

SR: That *is* very special.

PN: *Very* special!

HN: And their house is full of books!

SR: *Full* of books! She has her library card, and they go to the library every week.

Chris is a wonderful father, I think, and so imaginative. They take trips, and thank God they come here once or twice a year. And Chris is doing just fine as head of the legal department at Likon—is that the name of the company? Likon Electronics in Taiwan, in Taipei.

And youngest is Dan, who is married to Elise, who is a public treasure in this country in her ecological work for women and children especially, and who is

immensely competent, and a good mother. And Dan is a wonderful father too, to Robbie, whom they extracted with enormous difficulty over the course of six months, from the government of Nepal. That's an adventure too long to go into, but it was hair-raising and hazardous, and they finally safely got him to the United States. And Robbie is five now, and doing fine, learning to swim, and reading lots of books, and making lots of music, and beheading the thistles on their rural trails.

HN: The nettles.

PN: The nettles and thistles on Rigby [phonetic] Island. We just couldn't ask for anything more. We'll die happy!

HN: And they get along together. They had such a good time putting on a surprise birthday party for me, that they decided, "What next?" And they're going to climb Mount Rainier this summer, the three of them. They'll come from Colorado, Taiwan, and Washington, to climb a mountain together.

PN: So before we become insufferable, that should be enough.

SR: Well, you *haven't* been insufferable. It has been such a joy. It's been an honor and a pleasure to be in your home with both of you, and to be able to not only listen to you, but to have your wonderful meals made by both of you from your scones and soup and salad, and you picking arugula. I mean, what could be more fabulous? to be here, and even to have welcomed my daughter to come and take photos. Just sharing all of this has been just so special. I know that San Diego State University is going to very much appreciate your generosity in sharing your lives and your work. And I'm sure that not only the university, but those who'll

be having access to learning about you on the Internet, and by coming into
Special Collections, will also be able to enjoy this. So I thank you very much.

HN: We thank *you*!

PN: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]