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## James Porter, February 15, 2019

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Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral Histories

Oral History Interview with James Porter (JP)

Interview conducted by Historic Preservation Graduate Student Matt Jones (MJ) and History Undergraduate Student Mia Colavito (MC).

Transcribed by Matt Jones

Recorded 2019 February 15 at the home of Dr. James Porter, Saline, Michigan

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**OMIT 00:00 – 3:20**

MJ: It is Friday, February 15th, 2019. This is EMU Historic Preservation graduate student Matt Jones along with fellow EMU student Mia Colavito and today we are in the home of Dr. James Porter, EMU Emeritus faculty member formerly with the Department of Physics and Astronomy. Hired at EMU in 1968, Porter attained Emeritus status when he retired in 2008.

Can you tell us a little about your upbringing? Where you are from, who your parents were, what they did?

JP: My dad was a mechanical engineer. Porters come from Southern Ohio and that's where he grew up. I just brought up from downstairs a record of the Porter family going back to William Boggs Porter in the 1880s

MJ: From this area?

JP: No- southern Ohio. My mom was from Kansas City. I think my Dad met her when he was working in a field office of the Bailey Meter Company, which is now part of Babcock and Wilcox. My mom was mainly a housekeeper but she did teach school occasionally. I think in the 50s, she was teaching in one of the Cleveland suburbs and she had an unruly class. She walked in and she taught that class and she said "You know, you see that door?" The classroom door. The students said "yeah." She says "Well, I can go and walk right out of the door. I won't come back. If you're quiet and you want to learn, I'll stay. If you don't, I'll walk out that door." She was a substitute. Didn't matter to her whether she stayed or not. They quieted down.

MJ: Did you ever pull that on one of your classes?

JP: No, but I'll tell you something else that happened to me as a student. This was in junior high. We, in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, had heard the story of Harry Gordon, he was an assistant principle but also taught some other course, and I don't know what it was. We were in Harry Gordon's course and everybody was talking- it was exciting, it was the first day of class. The bell rang, and people kept talking, talking, talking, talking. Harry Gordon sat at his desk. Didn't say a word. He waited, maybe five minutes later, people began to get nervous. Here's Harry Gordon- has a reputation as mean teacher, and he isn't saying anything about us talking. Everybody quieted down until

finally you could hear a pin drop. Then, Harry Gordon took an inkwell and clashed it on his table repeatedly. Then he stood up and he told us in the next twenty minutes why we never were to do that again in his class. Ever. You know what? We never did.

MJ: Why not? Were you scared? Frightened?

JP: Yes. Yeah. I toyed in my mind with doing that same thing to one of my Physics classes. This was a class for students who were going to teach or mentor students. Maybe junior high. Just to do it to them to see- to give them that experience. But I never did. I couldn't bring myself to do that.

MJ: Were your parents educated?

JP: My dad was a mechanical engineer so he had a college edge from Ohio State. My mom had a degree from KU- Kansas University- so she had a teaching certificate as a young woman. In her...do you like science fiction? Do you know the name Robert Heinlein?

MJ: Yes. Stranger in a Strange Land.

JP: Yes. He was in her class. In high school and in junior college. Same graduating class as her. We brought him to campus when I was an advisor to the science fiction quorum. This was some years ago.

MJ: Were there any people when you were in school that pushed you toward a career in teaching or in physics or physical science? How did you go that direction?

JP: From the time in high school I was at Cleveland Heights- that high school has more PhDs than any other high school in the country. As to graduates in my class, there were absolutely brilliant people. One of the two or three most brilliant people I've ever known- one of them was my good friend in that class. I was not up there with those people but I got infected with some of the enthusiasm for math. Kenny K. was one of the people I am talking about. I was close to Kenny for a lot of years. In high school algebra class, Mr. MacAfee made the comment that there was a formula for the sum of a square of numbers. Well, it's easy to add up the numbers if you don't square them, but not so easy if you do. Kenny went home and figured out how to do that. McAfee couldn't remember the formula but Kenny solved it. I struggled with it for months and couldn't do it. Couldn't do it. Finally I begged Kenny "Just give me hint." He says "alright- you have to find an alternate representation for the square of a number." I thought what does that mean? Well it didn't help me, but you know what? Years later as a graduate student I was teaching, I was in the library looking up some things for reference to a class. I was reading the correspondence of Isaac Newton. It talked about Newton's approach to many problems among them, summing the squares. It said that the first that Newton recognized was that he had to find an alternate representation for the numbers. The SAME WORDS. Kenny was a young high school student and he had never read Newton but he came to the same conclusion. I know now exactly how to do it and what that alternate representation is and I'll tell you if you're interested.

MJ: I am.

JP: Any square can be represented as the sum of a series of odd numbers.  $1$ ,  $1+3 = 4$ .  $1+3+5 = 9$ .  $1+3+5+7 = 16$ . Blah blah blah. OK? That's the ultimate representation that you need. What

Kenny did- you add the numbers vertically and you get the squares over the top, but he added the columns horizontally. Got the same thing but now he a formula for the sum.

MJ: Wow.

JP: Smart cookie. Kenny was in interesting person. We both went to Case Institute in 1957. We went two semesters there- the second during the summer. At the end of that summer term, Kenny left and went to Europe where I heard later he became a millionaire by founding a computer business there. He used to service TVs in high school, he knew pretty much everything. Extremely bright guy. Years later, some connection to me in KC, someone sent me an article that was a big article that was published in Kansas City Star about Kenny. It turned out that Kenny ended up on the FBI's Most Wanted List. He had kidnapped a Mexican millionaire and kept him prisoner in his van and drove around the states to various houses that Kenny owned at the time. It talked about his arrest. They had staked out the house which they knew he had lived. Kenny walked around the side and the agent back there said "Who's there?" Kenny says, "Scottsworth." Kenny knew the names of the agents. The agent looks at him and says "Not this time Kenny." They said in that article that this was the most difficult fugitive that they had ever apprehended. Anyway that was Kenny.

There's Byron Schaefer- another fiend. He went to Wooster as a history student. Someone in the History Department was reminiscing about Byron and said, "We never had a student as bright as Byron Schaefer ever." He went on to become a Presbyterian minister. There were other people too, I could go on. One of the people that was, but not the only one. When national merit scholarships were awarded, I didn't qualify for one at the high school. But my mom was pissed that I didn't get a scholarship. So she had me take the Ohio State scholarship test. I got 7<sup>th</sup> in the state. That's how these people were in high school. I wouldn't have gotten that if they had taken the test. So yeah.

MJ: Before you did you undergrad, did you even imagine becoming a teacher?

JP: No

MJ: What were you thinking you'd do post-college?

JP: I just liked science. Liked to fool around with mathematics, maybe be an engineer like my dad. I have an engineering science degree from Case Western. Transferred to Purdue. Incidentally, I thought Case Western is a wonderful school. Head and shoulders above Purdue. My thermodynamics at Case was as presidential advisor. My history teacher at Case was wonderful. I walked up to him one day and I said "Why are you here teaching this engineering stuff? You could be at the prestigious ...anywhere!" because he was that good. He was wonderful. He said "Well, I'll tell you why I'm here Jim- they pay me more." It was a private school at that time, Case Institute. I got to Purdue and it wasn't as good.

MJ: How did you choose Purdue?

JP: I must have known someone who was going there and they had an Engineering Sciences degree program there.

We played a lot of ping pong, Sanford G. ran a ping pong club in Cleveland. Purdue has some of the best players in the country. Some other people in my high school that I played a great deal with. One later became the Ohio State champion, another was junior champion of Wisconsin. These are good players.

MJ: You still play?

JP: Yeah, I have a table in the basement. I went over to the senior's centers to play. I had a shoulder replaced. I was just ok because we hadn't been playing in years. I said, "Joanne, we're going to start practicing." I ordered a Japanese paddle. It's going to take me half a year to get up to speed.

MJ: Is the Japanese paddle the upside down kind?

JP: They hold it upside down but you can use an American grip. They make the best quality for the least price until Trump puts a tariff on it. That could screw it up.

MJ: Do people ever get intimidated playing a physics professor in ping pong? Do you think you have an advantage?

JP: No, not in ping pong. I played at Eastern only with one person. Gosh I can't remember his name now but he was a guy from Eastern Europe in the History Department. L. something. But anyway, no- when you play chess, that's sometimes especially if you have a beard and you're a professor- that's a little intimidating until people find out how bad you are. You can be beaten by a ten year old in chess.

MJ: Yes. I have been. Often. How were you supported in grad school?

JP: I taught. My first teaching assignment was in calculus based introductory physics. Incidentally, after I graduated I had really no intent to go to graduate school. I was going to be an engineer. So I went to GE and was designing dishwashers. Engineers were in demand. That was when Sputnik had happened and suddenly the nation realized, my God we need science, we need engineers, we need physicists, we need all these people like crazy. The Russians were ahead of us. So designing dishwashers an interesting experience. Our boss, we had probably fifteen engineers in the area. Our boss was J.D. W. He's a big Scotsman with a mustache like this. Shut the door to his office and he never came out. I never saw him during the months I was there, talk to any of the engineers that he was in charge of, ever. Partway through the summer ii was there, a guy named S. came in. Every day he walked into J.D.'s office and talked to him. I wondered what he was doing in there. What are they talking about? Well, S. convinced J.D. that he was the one who had designed the new silverware basket. But that wasn't true. N., the engineer primarily responsible and a very nice guy, looked at me when we were going up to cafeteria and he says, "Jim, you can see the footprints up my back." GE has a complete, and they still do as far as I know, organizational reorganization every 18 months. Everybody is fired and you apply for a new job. If your boss likes you and they're still around, you might get rehired. But if not, you'll go work over there. Usually there is a reshuffling but the average age always drops during this reshuffling. That is what sticks. Guess who our new boss was after the reorganization? S.. So that kind of thing showed me an aspect of industry that I found disagreeable. The asslicking.

JP: Is that when teaching started to make sense?

JP: No. I just thought I wanted to do something else. I'd taken interest tests, I thought about weather forecasting. I thought really seriously about the Presbyterian ministry. Then I talked to a minister about it. We had a good conversation and I learned some things. I didn't want to go into it. I realized at some point during that summer that I was enjoying talking to one of the other engineers about relativity. I had a friend that I knew very well as a junior and senior at Purdue. One of the graduate students in Physics who was an advisor to one of our resident units. One of the books that he used, I purchased, and I found it interesting. From the University of California, by Robert Leighton. A wonderful writer, and the section on relativity was absolutely fascinating. I just didn't realize that the universe was like that?! You can have an observer see two spatially separated events- things like bombs going off or something, that are simultaneous and that start clocks simultaneously that read the same time ever after for that observer. You can have anybody who is moving relative to that observer to the left or to the right, those clocks are not simultaneous anymore. "Simultaneous events" really are not simultaneous. That is hard to grasp.

MJ: It is. You're right.

JP: But it is absolutely true beyond a shadow of a doubt because it had been experimentally tested over and over and over.

MJ: When you started teaching at EMU, I know you taught Physical Science, kind of an introductory course.

JP: I didn't start at EMU, I started at U of M.

MJ: OK. I kept wondering while looking at your course loads if you got many students who really were having an introduction to these things, and how to get kids to grasp the concepts like that one.

JP: You want to know the sad fact of it? That people who train in physics, whether it's at EMU because we have to beat U of M or because, I don't know, other departments didn't want to give physics the credit hours, I don't know. But when I took physics at Case Western, I had two years four semesters, 16 weeks each, to cover mechanics and thermo and everything else. Magnetism and electricity. So I finished that, then I came to Purdue. Well, I was with some people who were taking physics in my residence unit. They found out that "he knows- go and ask him." because I was only a junior then. So, my middle name is Colegrove, but they began to call me "Snowgrove." I learned more in that next year tutoring these people than I had in my first two years because when you have to explain it to someone, then you find out you really need to understand it. So that was four semesters, sixteen weeks each. Now we teach the same material at U of M, the same material at Eastern, in one year. Two thirteen week semesters. It's like what one of my colleagues says- it's like drinking from a firehouse. So of course they don't understand it. It's way too fast. Way too much. A rotten way to teach physics. So that is what we are saddled with at the Physics Department. A rotten way to teach physics.

MJ: How did you get to EMU?

JP: I met someone at a dance. Charles Breedlove. I lived at Ivanhoe House and Breedlove was living there. We got talking and he's a professor in the Physics Department and he says "We are looking for people. Why don't you apply over there?" I was thinking I'd go down to Kent State probably, because I didn't publish enough papers at U of M to satisfy them.

MJ: Did you have any affiliation with EMU before you applied?

JP: No. never heard of it.

MJ: What kind of campus did you find when you showed up? What were your working conditions like? Did you have equipment that you needed?

JP: Yeah we did. Dr. Gessert spent a lot of time in the prep room. He knew his way around and was happy to show me what I might be interested in. I'll tell you a story that doesn't reflect well on the University. It's kind of sad.

MJ: Before you do that reminds me- if you ever want to go off the record about anything you can just say so and I can make a point to take it out.

JP: You can edit it. At U of M I had an intermediate mechanics class. This is junior level in mechanics. I taught from the book by a man named Simon. If you drop a weight on a scale, you can dampen your motion on the scale in such a way that it just settles quickly to equilibrium. Any time you use scales at the store, the groceries are weighed that way. When we got about halfway through that term we had about 35 people in the class. I had a terrible experience in the class. My pants became unbuttoned and my pants started to fall down. I didn't have anything to hide behind. Ugh those people were laughing. I said "God I got to get out of here." Anyway, one of the students, G., quit halfway through. I didn't see him any more after that halfway point of the class. When I got to Eastern, I taught mechanics again. This time, Simon was too tough. We had a different text by a person, I can't think of their name. Simpler. Didn't go into quite the detail with the scale. George turned out to be in that class. There were only 7 students in that class and G. was my best student. Yeah. He couldn't hack it at U of M, but he was my best student at Eastern.

MJ: Ok. Where were your offices? Were you in Strong/

JP: Third floor yeah.

MJ: Do you remember which room?

JP: My first office was with another person- Dr. Robert Silver. Turned out that I was very fortunate to have Bob Silver as an office mate. Of the three people in my life, my friend and graduate school at Purdue was one- a very devout Christian. I came to understand what devout Christianity really mean through him. The second is Bob Silver and the third is Joanne, my wife. Those three people have influenced me more than anyone else. Bob, because he was, he's dead now, was such a humane, fair, beautiful person. I mean, everything about a person that you could praise, was Bob. He really was. And he was good for me to be with him during this tumultuous between '68 and '71, when things were happening on campus that have never happened again since, and hopefully never do again. I wish I kept records of this time because it was a remarkable time, but I found time and time again that my immediate reactions to some of

these outrageous things that were happening, were tempered and even sometimes reversed when I saw how Bob reacted.

MJ: Can you describe how he reacted to some of these things and what those things were?

JP: Let me say this first: sometimes students come in with questions, into your office. And I can remember sometimes, and I probably am guilty of this sometimes, man- you haven't done your homework. You haven't really thought about this stuff. Well go think about it and then come back. I don't know if you've had that experience.

MJ: I have.

JP: I have seen Bob Silver spend hours with students and never, I don't think, tell them that they hadn't done their homework. As far as specific examples, I wish I could give you some and I can tell you the kind of events that happened to cause this kind of discussion. We had a staff member named Larry Hockman...

MJ: When you called yesterday I think you mentioned Larry Hockman to Amber in the Archives. When she told me that, I went and I looked up that whole thing.

JP: Did you find the Ann Arbor news article?

MJ: I found a bunch of articles and the whole, some kind of board meeting interviews with Sponberg, interviews with Hockman himself. Tell us about that.

JP: Larry was the Vice Presidential candidate with Eldridge Cleaver in the 1970 presidential election. He ran with the Black Panther Party. At that time with Nixon in charge, the Panthers were considered a threat. I went to some demonstrations about the Vietnam War. You have to remember at that time the Vietnam War was a big issue. A big issue because people were being killed and drafted against their will and being killed. A horrible thing was happening. So, Larry then distributed on campus an alternative newspaper called The Second Coming. The Echo, at that time, had a picture on the front page of ten young women in their swimsuits- the swimsuit contest. Who was going to be swimsuit queen at Eastern? This, today, it's not PC to do this. To judge women on the basis of how they look in a swimsuit. Even in the national scene now they don't do that anymore. But they did then. The article bought into that and they had a picture of the swimsuit contestants. On the front page of the Second Coming, someone had snuck into the stage and took a picture of the rear ends of these girls. Put that on the front page. Sort of giving a message saying, "this is what you really want to look at so here it is." Well, Jim Barnes our Department Head was very conservative. They wanted to get rid of Larry in the worst way. Silver and I were the only two people who testified in his favor in this hearing that was held in Pray-Harrold. We did it because he was being fired for the wrong reason. We thought he should be fired because he never came in until three o'clock, never talked to students, and he left, didn't have office hours, and didn't ever do a demonstration in class. We thought, what do we need him for? Horrible thought, but. Yeah, he would never show up except on days when he taught- he would come in, teach, and leave. To me that was not what being a professor at EMU was all about, and not to Bob Silver. But they were going to fire him because he went against the administration and distributed this underground newspaper. I think because maybe too, he was



with the Black Panther people. I don't know but I think that might have been an undercurrent. Just a guess.

So they fired him. There was an issue- did you catch it? Whether the board actually has the legal power to fire a faculty member. Tenured or not- get them out of there. Or whether that's the prerogative of the president and the provost and the Dean. I do think that's a question that needs to be answered. This issue should be answered in a court of law because it was the regents who fired him. With Sponberg's approval.

MJ: The deposition I read was between a lawyer and Barnes. It was just an incredibly contentious back and forth.

JP: Hockman later got a law degree and he was legally oriented and did a beautiful job of attempting to defend himself. We thought, Silver and I, that he was right- that he was being fired for the wrong reason. That he shouldn't have been fired.

M: I was reading it and everything that Barnes was saying was negative about Hockman. "He never comes in. He doesn't stay." And then at one point, he says "But I don't think he should be fired for the reasons he is being fired."

JP: Jim said that? Interesting. I'm, glad he did. He was right. I think he's right. Clark was right.

MJ: What was Clark Spike like? We have heard a lot about him.

JP: I don't know. That was my only direct contact with Jim. Much later had Jim, his son, as a student in quantum mechanics and Jim was bright.

MJ: Any impressions of Sponberg?

JP: I liked him. We went in as new faculty member and Sponberg got us all together- the new faculty members. He told us we were welcome there, he told us jokes, he made us feel at home. I was glad I was working at Eastern after listening to Sponberg. That never happened again. Who do you think is our worst president?

MJ: I've heard many things. I've read Larry Smith's book.

JP: After Sponberg. Who was the worst after Sponberg?

MJ: After Sponberg? I've heard it was James Brickley.

JP: Yes.

MJ: OK.

JP: Brickley became president, as far as we could tell, for one reasons. He wanted to quietly divorce an alcoholic wife so he could be governor. He was lieutenant governor at the time. He wanted to lose this wife. So Eastern was a stop along the way. He didn't care about education. Didn't know much about education.

MJ: Did it work?

JP: Yeah. It did. He didn't get to be governor though, but got rid of the wife.

MJ: We've heard rumors about that.

JP: That was a rumor that spread.

MJ: We spent an entire semester interviewing African American activists on campus.

JP: When I read the material online. I was kind of surprised about your emphasis, and I could only conclude that it was because black kids were interested in it, that your emphasis was on the Black Movement during that time. It was certainly there- I mean, Eldridge Cleaver, come on. But from my perspective, that had very little to do with what happened. What had to do with what happened was the bombing of Cambodia. Have you seen the movie "Vice?" There is a scene where Rumsfeld is talking to Cheney before Cheney becomes Vice President. He says "You see that door?" Cheney says, "Yeah." He says "Well Nixon and Kissinger are in there deciding whether to bomb Cambodia." And they did, and in the next shot in the movie shows this dirt-poor farm in Cambodia with his water buffalo, oxen, whatever it is. Overhead comes this high tech B-52. Going to drop bombs on him. Students, when they hear that, we all thought "OK, we had Vietnam, now we're going to do another country? We're going to invade Cambodia? We're going to bomb them too?" It just was the last straw. People were just lividly angered more than I can really express to you. But angered enough so that 400 students walked through our building- we were symbols of the establishment. They threw rocks at my colleague John Wooley. They broke windows in our building. They broke the windows in the doors when we had glass. We had Plexiglas for years after that. When Wooley came out, I don't know if it was the same day or not. He looks up at the top of the parking structure- I didn't see it- he saw the riot police on top of the parking structure organizing for a raid. That's how serious this was. One of these students came in and said "I couldn't do my homework Dr. Wooley because my dormitory was tear gassed last night." Are you aware that that happened?

MJ: No.

JP: You should be. It's one of the most outrageous things that was ever done at EMU. Washtenaw County Sheriff Harvey- he had a reputation for being a hard-nosed, hard-ass guy. He came over and tear gassed one of our dorms. He was the sheriff. It ruined everybody's clothes, and one of the kids was in a wheelchair and had trouble getting out.

MJ: This was 1970?

JP: it was right around the time, I wish I could tell you exactly when it was. It was between '69 and '71. If you look up when the bombing of Cambodia happened, that started it off and within a week of that all these things happened.

MJ: I think that the reason that we concentrated on the black students and Pierce Hall was solely because the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year- this month, February.

JP: Of that occupation?

MJ: Yeah. But there has been a lot said about the Vietnam protests but not much about Cambodia. Everyone lumps it in with Vietnam. Was the National Guard on campus?

JP: Not as far as I know. I thought this was a police action. There were a lot of law enforcement present on campus but I don't know.

MJ: Do you know what that would have done to Sponberg. It seems like Sponberg was there at a time when so many things were changing. I wondered how he handled it.

JP: I have no idea. But I do know- I was a new staff member. Wooley and I were- when we got lunch over in Charlie Breedlove's lab, hoping to maybe catch a breath of what the senior faculty thought, what they were doing, we not secure because we were the last people hired. That kind of thing. I mean, after you have tenure and you've been there for thirty or forty years then you don't care anymore, you don't worry about things but you do when you first start.

MJ: Did faculty have any responsibility to help contain students?

JP: Not that I know of. We were targets, I thought. Because we were part of the establishment in their view. Sponberg too. So, no, after that at Eastern, nothing like anything like that ever happened again. Nothing anything like it. A dorm being tear gassed by the police? At night?

MJ: Why do you think it never happened again?

JP: Well, didn't have another Vietnam I guess, I supposed. The Vietnam War was fought for the wrong reasons. As the Pentagon papers showed when I read them. They knew from the beginning that they couldn't win it. From the beginning! It was all about body counts. There is a book written by a Vietnam soldier, called "Matterhorn," about a hill they took against the North Vietnamese. To take this hill, the North Vietnamese had machine guns in place. So they had covering fields of fire where the Americans had to climb up and try to overcome. So they did. And they counted the number of Vietnamese soldiers they killed. Sent that in. Each time the body count was sent to a higher level it was increased to make that officer look better. Maybe before. Then they were ordered to withdraw from the hill. The Vietnamese would reoccupy it, set up their machine gun nests again. Then they were going to take it again, and you know what? More bodies. Wanted the body count. They wanted dead Vietnamese. They didn't want territory, they didn't want to win, they wanted to kill Vietnamese and report that back to the American people- "Look how good we're doing. Look how many people we've killed?" the purpose of the military is to kill people. They are professional killers, that's their job. But to waste lives over and over again, why? Why would you? The only reason that we could think of was to save face for the people, Johnson in particular, Nixon after him, who pushed this war knowing that it couldn't be won, but we couldn't back out. They wanted to save face.

MJ: Did you have any returning vets in your classes?

JP: No, not that I ever saw. I was going to tell you about my first teaching assignment at Purdue. This was before any of this ever happened. This was as a graduate student at Purdue in 1959. 1960. I had 18 students in beginning physics. Three of them were returning servicemen. They were getting master's degrees as part of their Navy education program for, I forget, the GI Bill. For education. They sat in the front row of my classroom. The other 15 sat at a round table in the back and played cards. Every once in a while, the physics lecturer, me, I'd say to the 15 in the back, "You know, guys, if you don't listen and learn this stuff, you're going to fail." They'd

say "We know." Thank god for the other three- they asked all the questions and sat in the front row and I talked to them. It was my first class. I never had that experience again.

MJ: Did you have a lot of pressure, and what kind of pressure, to do research at EMU?

JP: Nothing like at U of M. At U of M they wanted four papers a year. It takes me about ten years to write a paper. That's just an observation. I'm still writing papers but it takes me ten year to write a paper. I'm working on that every day. If you're an experimentalist you might be able to do it. But at Eastern, the emphasis was on teaching and I thank God for that. I loved to teach. For me, demonstrations in physics- that's was the foundation of teaching- the demonstration, as well as time – time to consider new material. Let me give you a simple example. My Dad's physics textbook has –this is from the 1920s- it's probably ten-page exposition of Isaac Newton's derivation of the speed of sound. It was beautiful from the Principe. I read that as a high school student and marveled at the geometric diagrams and the logic of it and enjoyed it. Well, in our physics class, we have a two-line derivation. You do this, and here is this, and there is the answer. It's not the same. But you have to do it in two lines because you got all this material that you are packing in that they never had before.

MJ: The demonstration aspect- it sounds like you enjoy making that connection with students.

JP: These three pictures are of demos that I designed myself. Jack Jacques, our very capable shop man at the Physics Department, constructed them and for many years I used them every semester. These are original.

MJ: You can see it in the classes that you had taught as well- Science and Science Fiction, and Physics in the Home. Things like that. You can demonstrate it for students. That must be so much easier to learn.

JP: Well, you are sitting in a house- it is an example of many things that I learned teaching Physics in the Home. Do you believe that? Take a look at the windows. What do you see? Anything different?

MJ: Different than other windows?

JP: Yeah.

MJ: I did not know there was going to be a quiz. I don't know- there's no sashes, there's...

JP: Is there a window seat?

MJ: Yes.

JP: Why? How could there be a window seat? Could you sit on a normal windowsill?

MJ: No.

JP: What about that windowsill? Could you sit on it? It's twelve inches deep. This is a double sill. The outer stud wall is separated by the inner stud wall by five inches of insulation. We have R-30 in the walls instead of R-16. I found a builder who knew about such things. We saw his work up in Gaylord and thought this is the person we want. What he didn't do in Gaylord and what I did do in this house is put an air-to-air heat exchanger in. If you'd care to come to the basement I'll

show you. Most houses have the soffit starting right at the outside of the window. This doesn't. There's at least two or three feet up there before the soffit goes outward. Then the roof goes above that. The reason is we can put three feet of insulation at the corner of the rooms. There is R-60 in the ceiling- not R-30 like usual. So our builder, at the end, says "You can heat this house with a candle."

MJ: What else?

JP: Come into the kitchen and I'll show you.

MJ: OK.

JP: Joanne is an artist, so you see paintings, those are hers.

**OMIT 55:15 – 1:05: mic out of range during house tour**

MJ: Thank you for the tour. You've answered a lot of the questions that I have here. I want to talk to you about some of the Department heads you served under. We talked about James Barnes, We talked about Bob Silver, and there is another Department Head- Trouchet?

JP: "Tro-CHAY." Dan Trouchet. He now has lunch with Wooley and myself. Dan lost his wife, very sad, probably ten years...he had some tragedies. He lost a very bright young son too. Very promising in physics. But Dan has found a new love out in, she was in his high school class and lives out in Arizona. We're all for that, to see Dan happy again. Yeah, no one wanted to be Department Head. I didn't want to do it. I don't like administration.

MJ: Why not?

JP: Aw man! It's extremely frustrating.

MJ: Why?

JP: You maybe get to teach one class instead of three and the rest of the time you're arguing with people and trying to get things from the administration that they don't want to give you. A lot of paperwork. We used to do these giant program evaluation things. They were horrible! I went over and I talked to one of our Deans, can't think of his name now. But he was the one Dean that I could actually talk to. Not Dean of Arts and Sciences- one of the other Deans. I would see him on campus and I went over and I said "We addressed some of these issues," I can't get into details anymore, it's too long ago, but we addressed some of these issues in a previous review and I said "I'd like to have a copy of that back if could so I can read what we had put together at that time." It was a big load of work. Well guess what? They didn't even have a copy of it. That pissed me off royally but I didn't say anything. I didn't have any interest in being an administrator.

Silver was a good administrator because he was such a beautiful person. Very thoughtful about all his staff and looking after you and asking you what you wanted to teach. On and on. No one ever did that. One time, oh I'll tell you two stories about it. One time I was with the secretary out in the outer office and someone had been talking in Dr. Silver's office. He came walking out, straight-faced and about two steps after he got out of the door, he broke into laughter because he'd realized something Silver had said that was actually very funny. Another time, I was near

the door of the head's office and I heard Dr. Silver on the phone talking to someone and reading them the riot act. I mean, I had never heard him do that to anybody, but listening to that conversation for a little bit, I was suddenly very happy I wasn't on the other end of that phone call. He was a force. He apparently had pushed the administration to the point where they wanted to get rid of him. Tony Evans, one of the vice presidents called us all over and said "we are having a financial exigency, and we are getting rid of your separate status as a department. And you will no longer have a Department Head." That's how they got rid of Silver. So Elwood Kureth from G&G came up and thank God. Elwood was a wonderful guy. G&G was pissed because he spent his time with us! He's the reason that I'm still part of this Township Administration thing with the Zoning Board of Appeals. Elwood was on it at that time. He said "Jim you should ask our supervisor if you can get on the Board of Appeals. It's a good network!" I ended up on that.

MJ: Why was the Department Head job eliminated from Physics and Astronomy again?

JP: John Wooly thought it was just to get rid of Silver.

MJL: That was the sole reason?

JP: That was John's opinion. I don't know. That's what John thought. I just talked to him two days ago. He said yeah they wanted to get rid of Silver, which could have been true. But the rationale was that "We don't have the money."

MJ: When was it reinstated?

JP: When Dan Trouchet became Department Head. That was 7 or 8 years later. It was a while. In the meantime, Elwood took care of us. He was a geologist and a Canadian and I learned about Rift Valley in what is it- Alberta?

MJ: We have a Canadian here as well (Mia).

JP: Rift Valley. On the CP line- Canadian-Pacific Line between Vancouver and Toronto. Out west. But it is an amazing feature that I never knew was there till I took the train and went by it. It's about a mile wide and about thirty, forty miles long. It is a good mile deep. It looks like it is anyway- it's way down there. So here you are on a train and it's arid, dry, featureless landscape. You look out other window and you see way down there is a river. Trees, green, fields, animals, and lush stuff at the bottom of this rift valley. It goes on and on and on. It's an amazing geographical feature. I'm surprised more people don't know about it, but Elwood did.

MJ: Do you, in your time teaching at EMU, did you witness any ways in which students were prepared for physics? Did they change in the way that they needed to learn things over the years?

JP: Were they better or worse?

MJ: Yeah.

JP: Not that I could tell very much. The story about G. says a lot. My first thesis advisee- Roger Hart, I found his thesis. The only one that I didn't throw out, for unknown reasons- there it was. The

MIT mytack gyroscope that we worked with to do the thesis, that was thrown out. That was a gorgeous thing. He ended up working in a zipper factory after school. People go in all directions.

MJ: We talked about presidents- do you have anything to say about any of the other presidents you served under?

JP: Yeah. John Porter. The president I admired the most.

MJ: A lot of people say that. About Porter.

JP: We were eating at a table with a bunch of people and he was sitting either across from me- I think it was across from me and he looks up at me and says "How's it going Porter?" I said "Pretty good, Porter." He smiled. He's very capable and I liked him.

MJ: People talk about him being SO organized and SO on top of everything that he did, whereas past presidents might have been a little more disorganized. John Porter was definitely a librarian, and I think he came from libraries.

JP: He was Superintendent of Detroit Public Schools beforehand. I don't know what he's doing now since he retired.

MJ: We are getting down to the end here. Do you think there are any faculty members that you served with who never got their due? Overlooked, that you thought should have gotten more credit for things they did?

JP: Any credit you wanted, you had to fight for. Gosh, I don't really think so. I will say I very much enjoyed all the people that I worked with. Except for one.

MJ: Did we already talk about them?

JP: No. he doesn't work there anymore. But he threw me out of his office.

MJ: Do you remember what for?

JP: Yeah I do. I had put in a request for a graduate assistant and I said "I want this person." I didn't think about Fred, who had turned out wanted it too. He felt that it was his due to have this GA. I just didn't remember. I was thoughtless and didn't think about it when I asked that person. That's why I got thrown out.

MJ: Do you remember the teacher's strike in 76?

JP: Yeah I always marched in the strikes. I met a lot of my colleagues in other departments that way. I walked all over campus.

MJ: Was that handled well?

JP: Yes. I really kind of enjoyed it. I enjoyed getting out and walking and being active. Some of our staff members did not want to do that and I guess that was their prerogative but I felt that it was important to do it.

MJ: One of our first interviews was Sally McCracken. It was intimidating talking to a professional administrator. She's so skilled in body language and the art of the back and forth. She said we did ok though.

JP: I know Sally quite well. That's good to hear.

MJ: I know that students were upset by the strike. At least some of them.

JP: Some of them though yeah- they were paying for that, and they had a point.

MJ: Did you ever have to explain it to your students?

JP: No. As one of our retired people, who was retired when I started- Floyd Lieb, said, "This, (holding up his thumb) is the professor's thumb. The students are under it." that is exactly right. I had a girl one time, this was at Eastern, she came to me and she said "Dr. Porter I need to pass this course." I said "Well, young lady, I can't do that because you haven't attended a single class." She said "But I need to pass this course. It's a matter of life and death. If they deport me to Iran, they are going to kill me." I said "I still cannot give you the grade."

MJ: You said what?

JP: "I can't do it."

MJ: OK.

JP: Another student who will remain nameless, but I remember his name quite well, he was a star basketball guy.

MJ: Like Earl Boykins type?

JP: Yes. He just didn't quite get beyond a D- or something. He came in to my office repeatedly and said "I need better grades. I have to get a C." Here's this guy, six feet five, six feet six, and he finally ended up sitting in my office and crying. He had attended sort of, and I said "Ok look- you come next semester and you sit in every lecture, you take notes, you do it all over again, and I'll pass you this time." So I did. Well he came for the first few weeks, but after a while he came and he was laughing at me. Then he stopped. He had his grade. So I talked to the Dean, Don Drummond, and I told him this story and he smiled. This was out in the hall, I didn't go in to see him to complain. He says, "Well Jim you learned a lesson didn't you?" I said "I guess I did."

MJ: You bring up the Iranian woman because we are doing an exhibit of Eastern's place in the international scene. Just any effect that EMU has had. One of the areas is that order to deport Iranian students during the hostage crisis in 1979. Is that when that was?

JP: It could have been.

MJ: OK. Alright. I only have a few questions left and they are broad ones. We end with them often. Do you think you have a largest contribution to EMU?

JP: University gets overhead when you get a grant, and I got grants ten year in a row. The total of the grants was more than half a million. So that was doing acoustic programming for Ford. So yeah- they have that.



MJ: That grant was for the acoustics lab?

JP: No- writing software.

MJ: Was the lab there when you arrived?

JP: Which lab?

MJ: The acoustics lab.

JP: No we put that together, Norm and I. I got the chamber from Ford and the equipment was purchased with their money.

MJ: Norm?

JP: Vance. Wonderful guy. Talk to him. Of all the people who can tell you about Strong Hall, it's Norm and he is right there (pointing to a picture).

MJ: How hard is it to put together something like that? A lab? How much do you have to run by administration?

JP: No. We could purchase what we wanted. It wasn't their money- it was Ford's money. Do what you want. As a university researcher, you get a grant, then that is your money- do what you want with it. What you have to do is satisfy the people who provide the money. As Ron Howard, the person at EMU that I worked with, he's not there anymore, he was a juvenile diabetic and passed away. I said "Ron, I don't know what to do. With this grant." He said "Well, Jim, give them what they want."

MJ: The department can apply for a grant? It doesn't have to be EMU?

JP: You apply as a faculty member for a grant. You apply as an individual. You are the grant administrator. Obviously, your university contact is essential in doing this and that the University reaps an overhead percentage of your grant that's theirs, for their heating and cooling and the room and the clerical. But how you want to spend the rest is up to you. You just do it to satisfy the people who are paying for it.

MJ: Did they encourage you to keep applying for grants?

JP: No, I did that because, for one thing, I wanted to be promoted. Another thing- I found the work fascinating and challenging. Give you an example. One of the grants, I had to do a final report. The software packages I wrote were 3-4000 lines so they were big pieces of software. Now they're millions of lines. Try to write a piece of software and you can figure, if you write a big piece of software, the average time for an engineer to write software is about three hours per line. So you talk about a thousand line or two thousand line, you're looking at a lot of time. The report was due in mid-summer like end of June, back to Ford. In January of that year, I started being unable to sleep. There was something wrong. I was getting agitated. I thought, what is it? What is this? It dawned on me then that it was that I hadn't started writing the report that much ahead of time. I started the next day and I worked every day as much time as I could. I just barely finished it.

MJ: Did the project have to be evaluated by someone from Ford?

JP: The only evaluation I ever got was before the grant- the initial grant- was given. For the mathematical basis of the proposed computer algorithm. They wanted a simulation of the interior cabin of their new T-birds. To see where they should put the speakers and whatever. How does the sound feel? Was it uniformly distributed? They wanted software to simulate that. FEA is based on a variational method, which again, you probably don't know that that is. It is a whole area of mathematics called variational calculus. My former student who was then a technical specialist at Ford, pretty high up, he talked to me to do this. His manager, can't remember Eugene's last name, but anyway he called me into his office and wanted to talk to me before, about this grant. He said "Explain to me the mathematical background of what you're doing." So I started off, and I had been teaching FEA, and so I started showing him the basics and what we do. He looked at it for a while and said "That's fine." At Ford, the smallest amount of money, a single line in the budget, the smallest amount that was in their budget, was \$100,000. They don't deal with anything less than that.

MJ: This is a broad question, but what do you feel is the biggest weakness of EMU?

JP: I would say that like almost all universities in their class, regional universities, we look at the percentage of money that the state gives, which is decreasing by the way, always has been. You look at that, your income, and you look at the percentage that goes to faculty, the percentage that goes to administration. Look at that and see the trend. The administration doesn't have someone looking over their shoulder financially. But they have control. So what's the normal thing that happens?

MJ: They make more.

JP: You'll see that in the stats if you study them. You'll see it. What's one of the reasons that they can take more? You pay faculty less. How do you pay faculty less?" You don't get PhDs to teach. You get people who have to go to two or three schools to teach. These people, the lecturers, are a larger and larger part of the instructional cadre. I'm prejudiced, but my viewpoint is they don't know as much. They're not as good, they don't care as much. They are going on to other schools. They have things to do with their time besides sitting in offices talking to students. At U of M, speaking of talking to students, there is a strength in Eastern. When I was at U of M teaching the intermediate mechanics course, or one of the physics courses, there was a line of students that followed me after lecture like a row of ducks. They didn't go more than a few feet of separation between me and the first in the line. When we got to my office, I opened the door, they came in. Whether one at a time or not, it worked out I always wondered, why couldn't they just come up at their convenience? I found out. Senior staff at U of M, in fact almost everyone, they have to publish four papers a year. How do they do that? They work with graduate students. Who do they let into their office? Graduate students that are working on research projects with them. Who do they not let into their office? Undergraduates who offer nothing. How can undergraduate teaching show up on your resume? It doesn't. So when I got to Eastern, I found out, we can talk to students here. I did. One of the most interesting semesters I ever had talking to students was this one young lady in a summer course. Second semester of Physics for Pre-Med, without Calculus. She was brilliant. She came in after every class with a list of questions that she had picked up during the lecture. She didn't quite understand them. We would talk, usually for about an hour until she was satisfied that she understood every single

thing. Everything. Finally, one day, there's a thing that you can do with a microscope, having to do with where the objective lens is placed to get the most magnification. Usually, the image of the objective is placed at infinity but you can get a little more magnification if you place the image a little closer than infinity. She wanted to know about that. I had mentioned it in class. I said "Look- I'm not going to ask something that detailed on a test." The question immediately went out of her mind. That was the last she thought of it. At the end of the course, I said "Well, are you going to be in science or physics?" Because she could do it. She said "No- I'm in physical therapy." I thought, shit- I spent all these hours, wasted. I guess I would have done it anyway but I was really disappointed. One of the most brilliant people I have ever had. No interest.

MJ: I wonder what happened to her.

JP: Maybe she's massaging somewhere.

MJ: Any other strengths of the University? Or anything else you'd like to say on the record?

JP: I thought the people I worked with were wonderful. I loved them. I really did.

MJ: Why do you think it was so different here? Do you think you would be the same anywhere else?

JP: No I don't think I would have been the same at U of M. Ken Case was one of the professors there. At U of M at that time, the overhead money brought in by Physics Department grants, federal grants, was enough to finance the entire School of LSA. These people were important. Ken Case was one of them. Ken was talking at lunch one time. We had our own lunchroom. Faculty lunch room, with our own cooks. We had tablecloths, we had food the kids didn't get. We had service. It was a beautiful room. Faculty were like royalty. They're not at Eastern, by the way. Ken was talking about a new person they wanted to hire. Some Dutch physicist. Somebody said the guy was a real asshole. Abrasive, personality is lousy. Ken said "I don't care a damn about his personality. That has no relevance to this position. We want him." That's U of M at that time. U of M had two people who were interested in teaching. Jens Zorn and Gabby Wienreich, both superb teachers. Both of them superb researchers. Gabby in acoustics and Zorn in, hum, I'm drawing a blank here. Besides them, one of the people in charge of the undergraduate non-science calc. course when I was there gave a multiple choice test that was practically impossible. Then he left town and somebody else graded based only on a numerical answer, rather than on the work shown and students were crying. But their professor was gone. Those staff members typically would be gone a third of the time to conferences because that's where the money was. Left the students. So I would tell students "You want an undergraduate degree? Go to Eastern. Want a graduate degree? Go to U of M." Then you'll have the professors. Even then, as a beginning graduate student if you want to go as a second or third year student where you're starting a thesis. Incidentally let me say one more thing about my time at Purdue. I had a wonderful thesis advisor. I just loved that man. He told me one time that the most difficult decision that he made in his life- he grew up in East Philadelphia, was whether he would study physics or whether to go into the criminal world. He could've done either and he would have been superb as a gangster too just like Kenny was actually. He scared students because he talked like a tough guy from East Philly, which he was. He gave a problem to finding induced electrical currents in a rotating, conducting sphere, I'm sorry- rotating conducting cylinder in an external magnetic field. Not so easy. I did it, turned it in, he called me into his office and says

"You got this right. You're the only person that did. You're the person I want." He gave me the same problem with a sphere which I also did. Usually with grad students in physics, you have a problem that the professor wants you to work on. You're not going to use it as a thesis. You're just going to do it because he wants you to. He wants to see if you can. Then when it came to the thesis, I was working ten or twelve hours a day and I couldn't get it. I couldn't get the first thought in my mind of how to do this. I said "Dr. G. I can't do this." He says, "How long have you been working on this each day?" I said "Eight hours a day and I can't get it." He says "well work longer." I did and eventually I got an idea and that's what I have been writing papers about ever since. He invited me over to his house. Gave me dinner, told me stories.

Sammy Rechevsky. In the chess world. He's a chess master. Also a New York City accountant in my day. Great chess player. He came to Purdue and he played 24 boards at the same time. One board to another. The big Ten chess champion was there- a math professor was there. A guy was there that we were kibitzing. We said "Look- let him take your rook." A queen can sometimes get the enemy rook. When that happens sometimes you can trap the queen back there and you can take it. Are you familiar?

MJ: Yes.

JP: You're going to get his queen if he does that. Samuel Rechevsky comes around and he takes a look and he looks at us and he says "you'll never get it." And then he takes the rook. Well you know what? We never could get that queen! Shit! The guy got mad at us then because you have to pay money to be there and we screwed him up. The math professor was the only one left after a couple hours- the Big Ten chess champion had gone down to defeat, and the professor had four pawns to Rechevsky's knight. Rechevsky ended up taking the game because the professor could not stand the pressure. As time goes along and there aren't so many people, Rechevsky gets back to each player faster. The rule in 24 Boards is that when he comes over, you're move must be ready. R. doesn't wait there while you think about your move. This math professor told me after, "I can't stand the strain." He was a superb chess player but obviously not a young man. To get to that point with Dr. G. The point of the story is that the year before, Gartenhouse played and was the only person who tied Rechevsky out of all those people. Gartenhouse at that time had an officemate who was a go master from China. He was so excited. He learned Chinese to read the important Chinese references to go in the original. Brilliant guy. I still remember the rice paper book, thick thing. Alright.

MJ: That's about all we have. Thank you very much.

JP: You have to leave and drive back before it gets dark.

MJ: Yeah, we have to get back. I have a huge class on Saturday mornings, so I have to get back and work on that. We appreciate you having us in your house.

JP: You're welcome. Glad you could come.

MJ: Thanks for the food and tour.

**END 1:42:01**

