1-22-2016

Rohwer, Claude Oral History Interview

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Claude Rohwer (1961-2005)
Associate Dean for Graduate & International Programs
Professor of Law

January 22, 2016

By Brian Landsberg

Transcription by Jade Vo, University of the Pacific,
Department of Special Collections, Library

Subjects: Growth of Law School, McGeorge affiliation with UOP, Role of Academic Council, International Programs, and Justice Kennedy.
Landsberg: I am Brian Landsberg. I am a professor emeritus at Pacific McGeorge School of Law. And we are interviewing Claude Rohwer. I’ll ask some questions from the question sheet and add some questions of my own.

Rohwer: Good.

Landsberg: So what years did you serve at Pacific McGeorge?

Rohwer: Well I served at McGeorge before the Pacific was involved.

Landsberg: So you began work at McGeorge when?

Rohwer: February of ’61.

Landsberg: And when you started here what was your position?

Rohwer: I was a contracts professor

Landsberg: Full-time?

Rohwer: No, part-time. There were no full-time people in those days except for the registrar.

Landsberg: How many professors were there?

Rohwer: Probably about nine. We had the three first year subjects, the three second year subjects, and the third and fourth year were combined and they rotated which subject was taught year to year. So you had three third year/fourth year professors who taught one year and the three who taught the next year, and a couple who taught for just a semester so probably about ten professors.

Landsberg: And where was McGeorge located at the time?

Rohwer: It had moved out here, in what we call the circle room, which is now part of the library administrative facilities. It was a short row of offices going west on 5th avenue. The offices were about nine feet by nine feet, I would guess. There were four of them, I think.
Landsberg: What were you doing when you were not teaching?

Rohwer: First, I was in the California Attorney General’s office. Then I was with Downey Brand Seymour & Rohwer.

Landsberg: How did you get hooked up with McGeorge?

Rohwer: One of the fellows at the Attorney General’s office said, “If you ever need some extra money, go see Gordon Schaber. You can read bluebooks for him.” Then I said, “Who’s Gordon Schaber?” And he said, “If you don’t know Gordon Schaber, you don’t know your way around Sacramento.” That was a very interesting comment, considering the fact that Gordon had only been in town for a couple of years. Gordon made a big splash in a heck of a hurry. I came out, met Gordon. We talked for a little while and he said, “If you were going to teach law school, what subjects would you teach?” And I said, “Contracts or conflicts.” I don’t know why I picked those two, but that’s what I said. He said, “Well, I teach contracts and my partner, Horace Cecchettini, teaches conflicts.” I said, “I didn’t know that.” He said, “Well I’m getting too busy though. You think you could teach contracts?” So the next Wednesday night we team taught contracts from there till the end of the semester in June. Bob O’Neil was a student in the class and Bob tells hysterical stories about this young kid who came in and sat next to the Dean and tried to teach him contracts. Anyway, that’s how I got started.

Landsberg: So Gordon Schaber was the Dean?

Rohwer: Gordon was the Dean, yes - which is another story unto itself.

Landsberg: So, when did you become a full time professor here?

Rohwer: When we merged with the University of the Pacific.

Landsberg: What year was that?


Landsberg: Why did McGeorge become a part of Pacific?
Rohwer: Burns was the President of Pacific and he was out to expand the campus beyond the Stockton undergraduate operation. It had just merged with the Dental School in San Francisco. He was looking for a law school. The Law School needed to add Gordon Schaber as full time Dean and he wanted to get American Bar Association accreditation, which we didn’t have. He needed a university umbrella to have the solidity that you need for the ABA and such. It was just a natural marriage. We were fairly close together. There was one attorney from San Francisco on the Board of Regents who didn’t think much of the merger evidently, but it went through anyway.

Landsberg: Were you and Dean Schaber – did you have any concern about the merger? About having a university over the law school?

Rohwer: Well one of the concerns was a parochial, stupid concern and that was we didn’t want to lose the name McGeorge, and that we didn’t want to be known as Pacific Law School. We wanted to be McGeorge Law School which was probably a very dumb position to take, but that’s nonetheless the position we took. The other thing that was a concern was finances because in those days the universities were bleeding the law schools terribly. Law schools had few electives. They had small libraries. They had small faculties that weren’t paid too well. They had people beating down the doors to get in and they could charge whatever tuition they wanted. Catholic schools in California, for instance, with law schools, half their budget was going to the university. So we wrote a contract in which the university could give us money, but they couldn’t take money from us – that they could approve our budget, but since they couldn’t take any money from us, as a matter of fact they weren’t too concerned about approving our budget. It was just an automatic stamp of approval. This would continue for as long as the lease on the Circle Building with the city could be extended. Gordon had written a lease on the Circle Building with the city – they leased it to us for a dollar a year. They agreed to provide the yard maintenance as part of that dollar fee, and it was to last for x number of years, followed by a ten year option, followed by a five year option that went until 1994, I believe. I remember Gordon popping me on the shoulder and saying, “By then, we’ll all be dead.” In the ‘60s, that seemed like an eternity away. But in any event, we went through that period of the late ‘60s and
through the ‘70s and the ‘80s getting some money from the university. For instance, they gave us their position in line to get a federal loan for Blackacre, that was a huge construction project for us in those days.

Landsberg: What was Blackacre?

Rohwer: The big apartment building next to the faculty office building, between there and the McGeorge House. In any event, outside of them giving us some money, they didn’t take any money from us, and so we were in fat city as far as finances were concerned. That allowed us to really leap forward. We had California Bar accreditation, ABA accreditation, AALS membership, Order of the Coif – all in the span of about eight years.

Landsberg: And the AALS is the American Association of Law Schools.

Rohwer: The American Association of Law Schools, yes. Only about half the law schools in the country were members of it in those days, so for us to become a member of it was a major accomplishment. The budget was part of that, adding faculty was part of that, the library was part of that – although our librarian was not a credentialed librarian. She had never been to library school. They said that’s going to impede your membership. We didn’t want to lose her because she was a good person to work with, and so Gordon hired Marian Gallagher, who was the head of library school at the University of Washington. They have a special law library school. We hired Marian Gallagher to come down for the month of June and go through our library and tell us what to do for the next eleven months until she came back the following June. So we had her telling us what to buy and telling us how to put it all together. When the electronic arrangements came into effect, she gave us guidance as to what to do there. That was the typical way Gordon solved problems though – you don’t like our librarian, I’ll go hire an expert to come in for a month and show her what to do.

Landsberg: So when we merged with Pacific, did we have relationships between Sacramento and Stockton? Did you serve on committees and that sort of thing in Stockton?
Rohwer: We had a member on the Academic Council and we used to have to draft people to do it. Our general attitude in those days was the further we stayed away from Stockton, the better off we were. Let’s just say we had a rather juvenile provincial approach to our relationship with the University. We were McGeorge and we were proud of it.

Landsberg: Did that ever change?

Rohwer: Oh yes, I think it’s changed. I think it has changed. You have been closer to the faculty in the last couple years and you probably know better than I do, but it seems to me we worked a little bit with their international programs. I worked with Margie Ensign down there and so forth. I think that we’ve come to accept them as our university umbrella.

Landsberg: So between the time McGeorge became full time and became part of the university and now, how has the curriculum evolved?

Rohwer: Tremendously so, yes - too much so. We had a required curriculum, which was the courses that were tested on the bar, which are basic law school subjects and that’s all there was. We had a couple of electives. When the bar dropped things like conflicts, we kept it on as an elective certainly, but we didn’t keep it as a required course. Which kind of shows you what our orientation was at the time. The number of electives that we have developed today has changed completely. When you’re interviewing somebody in the 1970s, you said, “What do you want to teach?” and you expected them to say, “Property or contracts or torts or criminal law.” Today, when I was last involved in recruiting, you asked them what they want to teach and they’d talk about some esoteric subject – the comparative health law comparing Africa with Asia. I mean everybody’s got a specialty, which is not too relevant to practicing law and not too relevant to passing the bar. If they have to teach a basic subject, they’ll do it. But after they’ve taught it for a couple years, according to the Associate Deans I’ve talked to, they think they ought to be relieved from this onerous duty. And that’s been a really bad change in the school.

Landsberg: I think they’re still teaching the basics.
Rohwer: They’re still teaching the basic courses, but they really have to rally people to get them to do it and the professors don’t consider that to be their first order of events. The first order of events is the subject that’s an elective. If I were recruiting today, I’d be an international commercial lawyer and not a contracts professor.

Landsberg: So you actually did somewhat evolve into the international realm, right?

Rohwer: Oh, yes, very much so.

Landsberg: So how did that happen?

Rohwer: We had an alum who went over and did a year in Sweden - I think it was Uppsala or the University of Stockholm, I can’t remember which. In any event, he did a year in Sweden and he liked Europe and he wanted to stay over there, so he proposed to Gordon, Dean Schaber, that we have a summer program in Vienna and that he could be in charge of it over there. This sounded like an interesting thing, so in 1974 Gordon called me over and we sat down together. He said, “How would you like to be in charge of this?” And I said, “Fine.” Dennis was in charge of it from the European end, and I was in charge of it from McGeorge and we had a summer session with six students and a Hungarian professor and an Austrian professor. We had three professors and six students – eight students, I guess it was, something like that.

Landsberg: So that’s Dennis...?

Rohwer: Campbell.

Landsberg: Dennis Campbell and Arpad Erdai

Rohwer: Arpad Erdai was the Hungarian. The Austrian was a professor named Bruno Green. It means Brown Green in German. Bruno was Jewish and he had escaped the Austrian scene before the Nazis completely took over and was teaching at Minnesota, but he was an expert in European law, so he provided a wonderful comparative sounding board to work with.
Landsberg: So this was a program for McGeorge students?

Rohwer: It was originally for McGeorge students. The next year we decided to put it on jointly with Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles, which didn’t work well because we didn’t have a cooperative attitude or a common goal of what to accomplish. So starting the third year, it was a McGeorge program, but we attracted a lot of students from other schools because nobody else was doing it in those days. The only school that started a program like this before us was San Diego – the University of San Diego. They had – I can’t think of the name of the fellow down there who for years was their international program man, but in any event, he was one of the Americans who were leaders in the subject. Now everybody and their brother has an overseas program, but in those days there weren’t many, so we were able to recruit people from other schools.

Landsberg: You had a title of Associate Dean for International Programs, is that what it was?

Rohwer: Yes, that came a little later, but yes I did.

Landsberg: When did that come?

Rohwer: The late 1970s. Somewhere around ’78, ’79.

Landsberg: Did that mean the Salzburg program or did it mean more than that?

Rohwer: We had moved from Vienna to Heidelberg, Germany and that didn’t work out too well. We made a third move to Salzburg. They were just a new law school trying to establish an international program and so we both needed each other, and the faculty was cooperative, so we worked very, very well together. We started programs in other places in the late ’70s. We went from London to Edinborough and back to London and back to Edinborough. We bounced back and forth there. Edinborough was really gracious and helpful in how they treated us in providing professors for guest lecturers and professors to teach courses. There’s a professor there named Blackie who helped [Jim Adams] teach a comparable tort course - Jim Adams’ our professor. Then Prof. Blackie came over here and taught. He and Jim wrote together. That was the kind of thing the international program
did. You take Jim Adams who was a South Dakota inlander, who I don’t know if he had ever been to Europe, and he ended up being a writer of international comparative subjects because of having taught overseas. I had my little list of faculty and I went down who hasn’t taught overseas and the only one I couldn’t get to teach overseas was Tony Skrocki. He didn’t want to go. His wife said, “How would we get the laundry done?” I said, “The laundromats speak better English than you’d be amazed.” In any event, over half our faculty taught overseas while I was Associate Dean. It got us started with a lot of people who now give that credit for being what pushed them into international. Larry Levine, Frank and so forth, they will tell you that it was participating in the European programs. We got Frank to be the guest lecturer at the Waidring conference for European lawyers. Dennis Campbell is a very imaginative individual. He looked at the continuing education of the bar programs we had in the United States and Europe had nothing comparable to that at all, so he started putting on a continuing education of the bar course in the winter time in Waidring. They’d go to classes in the morning and they ski in the afternoon and write it all off their income tax. We provided a lecturer from Sacramento every year for that.

Landsberg: So did the international program have an impact on our curriculum in Sacramento?

Rohwer: Well, yes, yes. You could look at our catalogues and see that we had an unusual range of international programs. People that didn’t have any particular international background – I was going to say Steve McCaffrey, but that’s wrong - Steve McCaffrey had an LLM from Germany. But most of the people who later became involved in international didn’t have any background that would indicate to you that they were going to go that direction. It was because we had the international programs that they got involved in it – Christine Manolakas, for instance, and John Myers, people like that didn’t have an international bone in their body as far as you could tell, but later became quite interested in international comparative subjects.

Landsberg: So we had international or international comparative tax law?
Rohwer: I don’t think we had an international tax law elective, but Christine wrote on international subjects, and she wrote with a Canadian professor on comparative subjects. Having a tax professor who is writing on comparative tax law, it can’t help but come into the classroom setting. You couldn’t go through one of Manolakas’ tax courses without being aware of the fact that she had international comparative interests and having her expose you to some of those ideas more than once during the class – it inevitably comes out. People like Brian Landsberg too, I would imagine [laughs].

Landsberg: Yes, that’s true. So, can you say a little bit about Anthony Kennedy’s coming to McGeorge and his impact on McGeorge?

Rohwer: I didn’t know this until he spoke at my retirement dinner, that when Gordon talked to him about coming to teach at McGeorge, he wanted to teach contracts. I must admit that over the years I was a little bit surprised that he was teaching con (constitutional) law, because his law practice was currently business law, commercial law. At the retirement dinner he said, “It’s about time Rohwer is retiring, he’s the reason I didn’t get to teach contracts.” He told the story of him and Schaber having a lengthy argument over what he would teach and Schaber insisting that he had to teach con law. Now when things were over, I was thinking if Schaber hadn’t won that fight, if Kennedy had taught contracts instead of constitutional law, he’d never have been on the Supreme Court. Anyway, that was in the early ‘60s, I think it was about ’64 that he started, ’63 or ’64 – somewhere right in there. He taught as an adjunct in the evening. He was never full time. He became a 9th Circuit Court judge and continued to teach for us until he was appointed to the Supreme Court. At his confirmation proceedings, Gordon was involved behind the scenes in a very interesting way.

In any event, when he went onto the Supreme Court, of course he could no longer teach during the school year. But Gordon said to him – at that time there was a lot of criticism running around about Supreme Court justices who had taken a $5,000 fee to speak at some tobacco convention or something like this and they were all getting fees for speaking at commercial ventures of some sort or another. The question was whether this somehow prejudiced them in their decisions on
the court. This was getting written up in the newspapers at the time. So Gordon sat Tony Kennedy down and said, “You are legally permitted to earn a maximum of $25,000 a year off the bench, I’ll pay you $25,000 a year to teach in Salzburg – (which was good pay in those days) – and you won’t be able to accept any more money and you’ll avoid all this hullabaloo about the conflicts. Kennedy thought that was a wonderful idea and so the next year he teaches for us in Salzburg and of course this attracted students like flies to honey. We ended up with a hundred and some odd students. Almost all of them, except for the foreign students, almost all the American students were taking Kennedy’s class, which he team taught with Sionaidh Douglas-Scott, a Scottish woman who teaches in London. She’s a very, very highly qualified individual herself. She’s taught human rights from a European Union perspective and he taught it from a U.S. perspective, so that was a great course for students to take. Those were the Kennedy years. Our applications went up and it was quite a boost for the school and him still teaching for us.

Landsberg: So you as a professor, and as Associate Dean, you were obviously reporting to Dean Schaber. What was that like?

Rohwer: It was wonderful. Schaber was an outstanding leader. He’d take three or four of us to lunch and he would talk to us about a subject and we’d all put our two cents’ worth in. When we came back to school, we all kind of thought it was our idea and it wasn’t until later that you’d realize that he had planted all these seeds in your head. He didn’t order people what to do. He guided them to do what he wanted them to do. He did an absolutely remarkable job. The people who didn’t know Gordon before he had his stroke really missed out. He knew everybody. He knew what everybody was doing. There was an occasion when I walked into his office and I sat down and he said, “What’s wrong?” I said, “What do you mean what’s wrong? There’s nothing wrong.” He said, “Yes there is. I can tell by looking at you.” And I had troubles at home – in fact I was getting divorced, but he didn’t know that yet. This was the kind of individual he was. He could read people like a book. He could guide them the way he wanted to go. So while I was Associated Dean of the international programs, I never had a fight with Gordon
once. But I ended up doing things he wanted me to do. He was clearly the leader of the team and was a very, very good one.

Landsberg: You co-authored a book with him?

Rohwer: *Contracts In a Nutshell*, yes.

Landsberg: And what is a Nutshell?

Rohwer: It’s a series that West Publishing Company started and it’s a book that’s written primarily for law students or for people who are studying law for programs such as real estate sales, and things like that. There are some sales to undergraduate programs, but its primarily for first year law students. Anyhow, we did the contracts book – well, I did most of the contracts book. When he got to the place where he couldn’t participate at all, Anthony Skrocki became my coauthor. Now Mike Malloy is going to be writing a new edition with Tony and me. We’re looking for him to take the lead. It’s the biggest selling Nutshell there is.

Landsberg: That’s what I was going to say. It’s a… bestseller.

Rohwer: Yes, it’s the bestseller. We’re on our 8th edition now.

Landsberg: Did you do other writing?

Rohwer: Well, yes. Hans Lidgard, a Swedish professor, and Dennis Campbell and I co-authored a book on comparative agency law, which is a very different topic in Europe than it is in the United States. I didn’t realize we were comparing – when I began didn’t understand what we were about. We were comparing apples and oranges and we were half way through before it finally dawned on me that what they call agency law and what we call agency law were really two different things. All the arrangements where people have sales agreements with manufacturers and so forth, those are all called agency agreements in Europe. When you can terminate a distributor and when you can’t terminate a distributor are the key topics over there and of course agency law here is a much more micro issue. I wrote about six or eight chapters in books for Kluwer, which is a Dutch publisher. I wrote one of the international books – you wrote one…
Landsberg: Global issues?

Rohwer: Global issues in international law. I wrote that for commercial law with a lady from Florida, which never sold well. I did a lot of writing for the Vietnamese. I published a couple of articles about the Vietnamese legal process and its changes and so forth, but basically my work in Vietnam was for the government law writing process, not for writing articles.

Landsberg: So how did you get involved with the Vietnamese project? What was the Vietnamese project?

Rohwer: The Vietnamese project was a U.S. financed, USAID financed operation in Hanoi to provide assistance to various units of the Vietnamese government, such as commercial law, anti-trust law, tax law, accounting – things like this.

Landsberg: When did you start doing this?

Rohwer: 1994. The U.S. had its first contact, official contact with the Vietnamese – the countries hadn’t recognized each other yet – they had their first official contact with them and it involved the U.S Secretary of Commerce going over to Hanoi and meeting with some of the Vietnamese people. He said, in an expansive moment, “If there’s ever anything we can do for you, just ask.” They said, “Well as a matter of fact there is. We’re trying to write laws that would be acceptable to western commercial interests and we need help.” He says,” I’ll provide it.” And he goes home and he says, “We need to provide them with help.” And they said, “We don’t have a budget.” So they scrambled around and they found that the United Nations had appropriated some money to provide legal assistance to Vietnam and USAID said they could chip in a little money. So they were looking for a person to send over there, who will be jointly financed by the U.N. and the Commerce Department. Now they need to find somebody. One of our alums, Christ DelFino, is with Downey Brand, has been for the last several years. Anyway, Chris is in U.S. Department of Commerce.

Landsberg: Is that Downey Brand, the Sacramento law firm?
Rohwer: The Sacramento law firm, yes. But in any event, Chris suggested names of people who might go to Vietnam. He said, “Did you try Steve McCaffery or Claude Rohwer at McGeorge?” Well Steve McCaffery wasn’t really the person to pick because he’s a specialist in water law, that was not one of Vietnam’s problems in the 1990’s. In any event, they called me and said, “How would you like to come?” It was during the middle of a semester and they wanted me for four weeks, so I said, “I just can’t do that. I’d give you some names though.” And I gave them some names. One of them worked out fine and selected a Seattle attorney. They announced that he’d be the guy that was going to Vietnam and he wrote a letter to all his clients saying he’d be gone for a while because he was going over there to make some good capitalists out of those commies in Hanoi. And that letter fell into the hands of those people in Hanoi and that was the end of his trip to Hanoi (laughs). They scotched him in a hurry. So the lady in the Department of Commerce called me again and said, “It was so interesting talking to you and you taught in China and so forth. I think you’d be the person for the job and it’s going to be in June.” And I said, “I’ll go.” So in June of ’94 I went over there for four weeks and worked with two different committees. One was writing regulations for the civil code, which they had just adopted – which was pretty miserable. The other committee was working on a commercial code or a commercial law, depending on which they were calling it that week. So I went over there about eleven or twelve times over the next dozen years and worked with committees that were rewriting and progressing along with their commercial and contract law. One of them announced at a big public meeting that I knew Vietnamese contract law better than any Vietnamese lawyer in the room.

Landsberg: Did McGeorge students have any participation in that?

Rohwer: They did. I’ve been contributing to send a McGeorge student over at the summer time to work with a law firm that has a really top-flight lawyer running it. He’s got an LL.M. from Yale. His daughter graduated from McGeorge last year.

Landsberg: What’s his name?

Rohwer: The name of the law firm is Leadco, L-E-A-D-C-O, and his name will come to me in a minute...Toan, T-O-A-N. And they all go by one name.
Landsberg: Toan, right.

Rohwer: You’ve probably met him because he was here visiting.

Landsberg: Yes, yes I’ve met Toan in Hanoi and...

Rohwer: You met him in Hanoi also because you and Dorothy were both over there, yes. Well you must have been impressed with him.

Landsberg: Very, very impressed.

Rohwer: Just a wonderful guy.

Landsberg: So you mention China. What did you do in China?

Rohwer: I taught in Shanghai and gave a couple of guest lectures in Beijing.

Landsberg: How did that come about?

Rohwer: We had Chinese students in our LL.M. program and they worked it out to get the universities over there to pool together and bring me over to teach in Shanghai.

Landsberg: Do you know what university it was in Shanghai?

Rohwer: The lead university was the Shanghai Maritime Institute, which has a commercial law section to it. We had students from – was it Nihon? What’s the top university in Shanghai? I thought it was Nihon, but anyway there were a couple of judges and students from here and students from there, and a couple of practicing attorneys. It was an interesting assortment of people. It was during the winter time and Shanghai is in the temperate zone, so there was no heating in the buildings. It was snowing outside and it was cold. I’ll tell you it was cold. It was an interesting experience though.

Landsberg: I’m wondering whether these activities of yours abroad...well did you teach in other countries besides China?

Landsberg: Did that have any impact on the university, of the law school, in terms of our students or bringing in students, or sending students abroad.

Rohwer: Well, specific direct impact is hard for me to pin down. Like when I taught in Edinburgh, we had a senior California attorney in the class. We had a senior finish attorney in the class. She was the head counsel for the biggest conglomerate in Finland. Kemira, Kemira is the name of it. We got students primarily from McGeorge, but from other schools too. How does this impact McGeorge directly--hard to say. The students who were there, I think it impacted them tremendously. I think having the senior California attorney and the Finnish attorney in that classroom added to it because I had negotiating teams, so they’d be the chairmen of the teams. The teams couldn’t believe what they got put through negotiating the terrible problem that I had given them.

Landsberg: So you were an Associate Dean twice, is that right?

Rohwer: No, just once.

Landsberg: Just once.

Rohwer: For about 5 or 6 years -something like that.

Landsberg: But you were later under another Dean, no?

Rohwer: No. Maybe I was.

Landsberg: I thought you were, but I don’t know.

Rohwer: It could be. I honestly don’t remember.

Landsberg: Let me see something here.

Rohwer: I can tell you a very interesting Vietnam story.

Landsberg: Go ahead.

Rohwer: After I’d been over there for three or four or five years, some U.S. government agency sponsored an American trip for some of the young leaders in the National Assembly of Vietnam and they were going to be in San Francisco. So
one of my contacts over there said, “Why don’t you invite them to come up to McGeorge since they’re going to be in San Francisco anyway. So I got on that and they were happy to come to McGeorge because they had heard about me and so forth. And so they’re coming up here for lunch and Barbara Thomas, who was the McGeorge official hostess for everything for many years, she’s in charge of arranging the lunch for them. So she went downtown to buy some Vietnamese flags, so that she could put Vietnamese and American flags in the center of the table.

Landsberg: Oh, no.

Rohwer: That morning, she phoned me, and she said, “Claude, what’s the Vietnamese flag look like?” And I said, “Well, it’s red with a gold star.” “Oh,” she says, “they sold me a bunch of yellow ones with….” And I said, “Those are South Vietnamese flags,” so she runs over and she gets the flags off of the table that were already setting across from the American flags in the middle of all the tables. She got these South Vietnamese flags off the table and everything went very smoothly. It was all just wonderful. A few years later, when they were down to the final throes of trying to adopt the commercial law, the law committee, which was this same group of people who had been here on campus, decided to go over to Ha Long Bay, it’s a resort area over in the coast, to get away from the telephones and the competing appointments and so forth, to work on approving this thing for adoption. They took me with them, which they didn’t take any of the Vietnamese staff at all from the Commercial Dept. of Trade or the Justice Department, but they took me, which I thought was fascinating. We really had some big bad arguments over some things and the translator kept telling me that I was talking to a National Assembly and that I should give them more alternatives to choose and I said, “There’s only one right way to do this. I can’t give them alternatives.” In any event, it was a wonderful session. Most of what I wanted got done and I thought, had Barbara not checked those Vietnamese flags, this all could never have occurred.

Landsberg: Right.
Rohwer: It would have been an absolute disaster. They would never have dreamed that we did this, other than on purpose.

Landsberg: So Congressman Doolittle kind of eulogized you on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Rohwer: He did.

Landsberg: And congratulated you on your retirement as Associate Dean and he said that you were Associate Dean for graduate and international programs from 1982 to 1986 and “since 2003, he has filled duties as the Associate Dean for International Affairs.”

Rohwer: Okay, he’s exactly right. Doolittle is one of our students.

Landsberg: So he mentions graduate programs. When did McGeorge start graduate programs?

Rohwer: Well the international program?

Landsberg: That’s the LL.M?

Rohwer: That’s the LL.M program. It started in ’75, ’76, somewhere right in there. We put in for tax, business and tax, and international. McCaffery was on sabbatical, so he wasn’t on campus when the inspectors came and they said, “Where’s your international program?” And we said, “Well err....ahhh...” And they said, “Why don’t you withdraw that, so we don’t have to recommend against it.” So the international program was withdrawn. A couple years later we got our ducks in a row and got the international approved. There was no graduate tax program on the west coast, to my knowledge, in those days. You could go back to NYU; they had a good program, so did Florida, but there really weren’t very many. So we jumped in on that early, and Christine, then Dentino, now Manolakas, was one of the ringleaders, as was Howard Engle. There was a backlog of people in town who wanted training in tax and advanced business training and so we had a lot of local attorneys come back to participate in the program and it ran like gangbusters for a while. Then every law school in the country decided it needed a graduate tax program. Where there had been half a dozen one year, there were
more like forty the next year. The local market got saturated, and so that program kind of drifted into the background and the international program was what sort of became the dominant part of the LL.M.

Landsberg: What was your role in shaping the curriculum of these programs?

Rohwer: I was in charge of it, but the brains of the thing were the people who were the tax and business people, people like Phil Wile and I’m trying to remember who else was in the business area in those days. I guess Jim Groh was still there and.....

Landsberg: Don Berger.

Rohwer: Don Berger certainly. Absolutely.....and Don Prince. Let me preserve for prosperity a story about Berger that not many people know.

Landsberg: Alright.

Rohwer: Don Berger’s mother was a tall, blonde, Arian German from Berlin. His father was Jewish. One day during World War II, Mrs. Berger came home from work and went to the school to pick up her son. They said the SS came and got him. She scrambled around and found out that the SS had hit all the schools and they had picked up all the Jewish kids. She scrambled around to find out where they had taken them and she went there. The guard told her to halt and she showed them her identification and marched in. The German lieutenant said, “What are you doing here?” She said, “I came to get my son.” He said, “Your son can’t be here. These are just Jewish kids.” She said, “That’s my son right there.” He said, “Well, take him and get out of here.” So she grabbed her son and left. After the war was over, they came to San Francisco and the rest was history we knew. He told me about that one day and never mentioned it again.

Landsberg: That’s pretty amazing.

Rohwer: Isn’t it? Frightening.
Landsberg: Yes, it is. So let’s see. I’m trying to think of other questions about your work as Associate Dean. After Dean Schaber had a stroke, he was no longer able to run the school. Then we had a succession of...

Rohwer: Well, John Ryan was Acting Dean for a year and did a really good job, but John had had a falling out with too many people on the faculty and we needed a change. So in a very contentious dean search process, we came up with Gerald Caplan and he became the Dean. He was Dean for almost ten years, over nine years. He was a low-key dean that didn’t really push a lot of new programs or anything. But after the tumult of Gordon’s last years, as Gordon had grown distant from the new faculty, and Ryan was separate in part from them, we kind of needed a calming down period and that’s what Caplan provided.

Landsberg: There was a change in the market for law students during that period too, I believe – that there was a drop.

Rohwer: Well, the big drop of course occurred after the end of Elizabeth’s deanship. Nothing to do with her, but it just dropped all over the country. But I guess there was a slide off, yes. There was also a slide off after the Kennedy years expired. The appointment of Kennedy to the Supreme Court, really our applications went up 25 or 30 percent the next year. It was a huge jump.

Landsberg: Then Elizabeth Parker became the Dean after Gerald Caplan.

Rohwer: Yes.

Landsberg: What was that Deanship like?

Rohwer: She was interested in specialty programs. She was interested in international programs and expanding international programs. There wasn’t a new idea that she didn’t fall in love with. In those respects, she was an excellent Dean. She really didn’t have any direct concern or feel for what was going on in the torts class or contracts class or the basic subjects. That was during the time when the faculty was also reaching out to become specialists instead of teaching fundamental stuff. The Associate Dean had a pretty tough row to hoe during that period because she was the one who had to look after making sure that the basic
stuff got taught. That was when the faculty decided in a faculty meeting to cut the semester by one week each semester, so they could extend their summer vacation by two weeks and this was done by vote of the faculty, which I’ve always been very questioning how the faculty had the authority to change the school’s schedule, but they did and it was changed. It wasn’t good. It wasn’t good at all.

Landsberg: I wanted to just talk about the campus itself. When you started you said it was in the rotunda and a few offices going west from the rotunda.

Rohwer: Off of that rotunda is a little tiny cubicle and that was the Dean’s office. He went in there one night when I was there to get something off the shelf and came out with a package of needles. It, of course, was a medical clinic, so this wasn’t an adult hangout – finding needles in the Dean’s closet, we thought was kind of humorous.

Landsberg: So the campus has grown quite a bit.

Rohwer: Oh, the rest of it was a slum. There was an alley through the middle of the campus from east to west. There were three little rental units that the Dean called the little pigs’ houses and they were. The only building of any substance was what is now the McGeorge house. The rest of them were just about to fall down. On the corner of the faculty office building was a bar. Over that was a couple of rental rooms that the bar owner rented to a couple of our students. The whole library, public part of the library as it exists today was all slum building. All the way down 5th Avenue were all slum buildings. There was a through street in front of the student center, where the student center is now, and there was a good building on that, which is now the Dean’s office. There was one building that was saved there. The rest of them, if you blew on them they would fall down. It was really the worst part of Oak Park. You couldn’t believe how bad it was. Of course across the street was never never land. The house of prostitution was on the corner of where that terracotta building is now. They bought that and the Dean got our security officer, Howard, who a the deacon of his Baptist church, to go over with Gary Schaber and Rolly Botts in a pickup truck and a trailer to move the girls out of the house of prostitution on a Saturday morning. They gave them plenty of notice that they were coming, but they went over there and packed
them all up and put them in a car and put their stuff all in the trailer and hauled
them off somewhere. The policeman, the poor policeman, he was just shocked by
this whole procedure.

Gary Schaber and Gordon had just picked up a couple of properties, and I said to
them, “You know, this school is going to grow.” They had just built the wing that
has classrooms A and B in them. The Associate Dean’s office and Administrative
office next to it were brand new. We were in there and I said, “We’re going to
grow and we ought to be snapping up these properties around here while they’re
still cheap.” Gary looked at Gordon and said, “Can I show him?” And Gordon said,
“Yeah, sure go ahead.” Gary went over to his closet and opened the door all the
way and on the inside of the door was a three square block mockup of the
neighborhood. It had all the buildings in different coded colors as to which ones
we owned and which ones we were negotiating for. There were a couple of
judges who had bought up some of the buildings because they could see that
McGeorge was coming and they were going to make a big profit off of them. So
Gordon went down to see his fellow judges and discuss with them what it was
going to look like in the Sacramento Bee when the reporter talked about their
slumlord holdings in Oak Park. He bought all those buildings from the judges for
the price they had paid for them.

Landsberg: So where did the money come from for all of this expansion?

Rohwer: Primarily tuition. Gordon had had support from people, but it was in
relatively small sums. $5,000 would be a big contribution. There was a federal
grant which built the courtroom. There was a federal loan to build Blackacre. The
faculty office building was built so cheap Stockton couldn’t believe it. None of
these were bid contracts. They were all negotiated contracts. They were all with
the same contractor. Gary would sit down with them and say, “You’re too high,
what can we cut here?” They’d say, “Well, you know on Blomberg Glass and so
and so.” And Gary said, “Well, I’ll go talk to them.” He’d go and talk to Blomberg
Glass and he’d get their price down. Gordon was a genius, but Gary was awfully
close behind.

Landsberg: Who was Gary?
Rohwer: Gary is Gordon’s brother. He was Associate Dean of business – he ran the business end of the school, hiring secretaries and things like that. He ran it all out of his back pocket.

Landsberg: Until he died from what, a heart attack?

Rohwer: No, he died of asphyxiation. It was a sad situation.

Landsberg: But by the time he died, a lot of this expansion had occurred?

Rohwer: Yes, yes. There was a guy that retired from the State who had been the head of the State agency that provides all the buildings and stuff like that. He had a very high, responsible position. He had retired and Gordon talked him into coming on just for a year, and he ended up staying for several years.

Landsberg: Was that Donald Steed.

Rohwer: Donald Steed. He installed all systems; whereas I say, Gary ran everything out of his pocket. I told him I needed a typewriter and he said, “Do you type?” I said, “Yes, I type. I type faster than secretary – just not as accurately.” Well he said, “Fine, I’ll get you a typewriter.” I said, “I can get an electric typewriter for ____,” and I told him the price – cause my father-in-law’s in the business. He said, “That’s better than I can do. Go buy it and I’ll pay you back.” So I went and bought the typewriter. I came in and I said, “This is how much is cost,” and Gary gave me a check. That’s the way he ran the school. Don Steed, of course, just had a stroke when he found out that we were buying typewriters and getting reimbursed from the cash account of the school. In any event, Gary did a hell of a job.

Landsberg: Does the school campus correspond with that plan and so?

Rohwer: Oh yes, It corresponds to the plan. There was a plan to go to the north in that whole block, and some people got in ahead of us and bought up those apartments and put a little bit of money in them, not very much, and got them fully rented. The price they wanted for them was just too much and being rented, they probably could have gotten it. We never used condemnation. We had the power of condemnation and we didn’t know that until Gary found it in the
California Education Code. Gary was not an attorney of course. He said, “Well, what’s this mean?” We read it and said, “My God, look at it.” In any event, there were plans to expand the parking and buildings over there, but it never came to fruition. The Muddox building is added. That was a rather expensive mistake, but it’s going to be used now for profitable purposes.

Landsberg: And the old library building?

Rohwer: The old library building was donated to use by the Fuller family. They bought it and donated it to the school.

Landsberg: So let’s talk a bit about students, I think. The student body has evolved over the years, right? Can you kind of give us a thumbnail of how it’s evolved?

Rohwer: Other people would know better than I, where it is today. Over the years, back in the early 60’s of course, it was a walk in the door and you were admitted, sort of, and the attrition was unbelievable. You’d have a hundred in the first year class and 30 in the second year class, literally.

Landsberg: What happened to the other seventy?

Rohwer: They dropped out or flunked out. Most of them flunked out. Contracts paper come in, they were half D’s and F’s. It was a blood on the floor operation. People in those days – they didn’t expect any favors. They knew they could have prepared more for class than they did because all of them were working of course and going to class Monday, Wednesday, and Friday night, preparing on Tuesday, Thursday, and weekends. Saturday would often be writing sessions, where the Dean would bring in a bunch of young attorneys from town. People would write papers and they’d make comments on them and hand them back the next hour, while the students wrote another paper. They’d grade them while the students wrote another paper and hand them back. It took a lot of people who wouldn’t have made it in any other law school and got them through. The school had produced a lot of judges in the 30s and 40s. They were closed during the war of course. Small classes and yet if you went down and looked at the small bench in Sacramento, a good number of them are McGeorge graduates. They produced a lot of solo practitioners who were good members of the bar. They produced a lot
of good tough people. When we got the ABA accreditation, we admitted our first day classes. The evening admissions got more stringent and attrition went down. Again, we started out with admitting an awful lot of people who were questionable as to whether they should have attempted it, but that went by pretty fast.

Landsberg: So at that point, you needed more than one contracts professor, didn’t you?

Rohwer: No, I taught day and I taught evening. I taught about 200 students.

Landsberg: So eventually we had other sections?

Rohwer: Eventually we got two day sections and one evening section. I still taught two sections and Ryan taught the third one. Then we got Skrocki, so for a while we had three of us teaching three different sections of contracts.

Landsberg: Skrocki is Tony Skrocki?

Rohwer: Anthony Skrocki, yes. Anthony M. Skrocki is up in Sparks, Nevada now. He, Ryan, and I were very much on the same page in terms of what we expected from the students and what we tried to emphasize and what our expectations were on examinations and things like that. It was a very wonderful working relationship among the three of us.

Landsberg: You collaborated on syllabi and examinations?

Rohwer: Yes, one year the book that Tony and I had chosen to use didn’t get printed, so we said, “The hell with you,” and we wrote our own book. We turned it out in pieces ahead of the class for the year. From then on, Tony and I had our own contracts case book – cases and materials, which died when we quit teaching. We never offered it for publication and I don’t know that it ever would have been accepted if we had. But it worked very well for us.

Landsberg: What would you say your teaching style was?

Rohwer: Socratic, very Socratic.
Landsberg: What does that mean?

Rohwer: Well, there was a fellow who visited a lot of classes in Stockton, and then came up and visited classes in McGeorge. He couldn’t believe the difference. He said, “In McGeorge, you could go through a whole class and the professor never made a statement. All he did was ask questions and every student in the room had their hand in the air. Everybody was participating. He never saw the beat of it. In the classes he was in down in Stockton, nobody raised their hand and nobody asked a question. The professor just talked and then the class ended. That’s the kind of class we ran. Socratic is after Socrates. It’s a question and answer process. According to Mike Vitiello, I was the best version of the Paper Chase professor and he wrote a law review article about how the Paper Chase movie was nice and humorous, but it missed the point that the guy was really a heck of a good contracts professor. He said, “We had our role model of that at McGeorge.” He never named me, but he said, “Here. Here’s a copy of it. Read it. It’s written about you.” My teaching style was very definitely I expect you to be prepared. I expect you to respond to questions. Don’t tell me you want to pass. The word “pass” never was spoken in my world. It was a tough nosed operation.

Landsberg: How did the students respond to that?

Rohwer: Nine-tenths of them responded very well. There were some people who didn’t care for it, that’s true, but most of them responded very well.

Landsberg: Did you form bonds with students?

Rohwer: Oh yes. I was the faculty advisor to the Nevada students. We had a course in Nevada law, which I taught for several years. Nevada was part of the WICHE collaboration, which was Idaho, Wyoming, and Nevada, and I don’t know what other states. Anyway, they were states that had no state law school. Having no state law school, the state appropriated money to pay the tuition of students who went to law school out of state. So if you were a Nevada resident, and came to McGeorge, Nevada picked up the tuition. We became Nevada’s law school. About a quarter of the lawyers in northern Nevada were McGeorge graduates. The tradition was that you passed the bar. Nevada bar is tough. They have about
a 40-50% failure rate. It’s tough like California’s is tough. We had a 100% pass. We had 100% pass every year. I can remember Ron Bass was one of the more illustrious Nevada students of that time and I said, “What are you doing this summer?” He said, “I’m studying for the Bar.” He said, “It’s not going to be my name that’s written on Dean Schaber’s shithouse walls. (laughs) The Nevada version of what was expected of them. They were a great bunch of people.

Landsberg: So have you kept in touch with former students?

Rohwer: Oh yes, sure.

Landsberg: Can you describe some of those relations?

Rohwer: Yes, you get people like Ross de Lipkau, who is a water lawyer in Reno. He is Nevada’s top water lawyer. When Clark County, Las Vegas decided to get water down the east side of Nevada and bring it in to Las Vegas, they hired him to do their legal work. People in Las Vegas don’t ordinarily hire experts from Reno to represent Las Vegas. He was an engineer in the state engineer’s office, which is where water allocation decisions are all made. The water master of Nevada is the state engineer. Ross was an engineer in that office and went out and did all their fieldwork. He was a young kid and came to law school and then gets the law degree and goes back to work for them as a lawyer. So he’s got the engineering background, the law background, the experience of working in the office, and then he goes into private practice. Ross had all the bases covered. He’s just been a tremendous asset to McGeorge. We’ve got a lot of judges up there - most of them retiring now. One of them just died, Norman Robinson. Until Barbara Thomas retired, every year we had a Nevada alumni gathering up in Reno. She and I always went up and we’d take a couple other McGeorgies with us and Don Prinz used to always like to go. They’d have either an afternoon barbeque on a Saturday or else an evening dinner party. We’d have thirty/forty alums at those things every year. We don’t hold them anymore. It’s just too bad.

Landsberg: That’s interesting. What about California alums?

Rohwer: Our alumni in the Sacramento area has been – our alumni really has been active all over the state, considering where they’re located. We don’t have
too much activity in the bay area, but we don’t have that many alums in the bay area, I don’t believe. The Sacramento alumni have been - it’s been my impression that they’ve been pretty active and supportive of the school. Orange County has been active. Why, particularly down there I don’t know? Las Vegas was very active until the University of Nevada opened the law school down there.

Landsberg: So you served also under a number of presidents and provosts of the University. Did you have relations with them?

Rohwer: Oh yes.

Landsberg: Starting with President McCaffrey?

Rohwer: It started with Burns. I didn’t deal much directly with Burns. Gordon did most of the dealing with Burns. McCaffrey’s son is [was?] my son-in-law. I’ll pass on commenting on McCaffrey. The interesting president of the University followed McCaffery. He was from Clemson, which didn’t have a law school.

Landsberg: Was it Atchley?

Rohwer: Atchley. Atchley was left with a lot of incompetent people in a lot of administrative positions, from security to buildings and grounds, you name it. He had to shake some people up and he had to clean house. He got on the wrong side of some faculty and one of the faculty members, who was an attorney, started behind the scenes advising all the people that Atchley fired and they all filed complaints. You could read them and they were all written using the same language. This one professor down there was the instigator of it. Everything Atchley did they objected to. The Law School had people on Academic Council who jumped in on the side of the faculty. The University lost its accreditation or had it suspended or whatever it was.

Landsberg: The Law School or the University did?

Rohwer: No the University did. When that was lifted, the Academic Council leadership from McGeorge actually would join the group that opposed the reaccreditation of the University because they had a lot more bargaining power with the school administration while the school was on probation. That was the
kind of attitude that the faculty had. In any event, Atchley eventually was discharged and has an undeserved poor reputation down there.

Landsberg: He was followed by DeRosa?

Rohwer: He was followed by DeRosa, who knew how to handle people and did a good job at handling people, and from our observation was a wonderful president.

Landsberg: Did you deal with his Provost, Phil Gilbertson?

Rohwer: Phil Gilbertson was tremendous. The only thing Phil Gilbertson and I disagreed on is the fact that he wouldn’t listen to any of the law professors on legal subjects. They had to go hire their attorney from San Francisco, who caused them more grief than you could shake a stick at. Atchley came up and got legal advice from Gordon and me on a couple of occasions when it was my area. When I told that to Phil Gilbertson, he was absolutely appalled. He just thought this was the worst thing in the world. They needed independent attorneys from San Francisco to advise them. They couldn’t take advice from the law school.

Landsberg: So what kind of matters would you have occasion to talk with Atchley?

Rohwer: Contract matters with the faculty. I can’t go any further than that.

Landsberg: So personnel?

Rohwer: He was trying desperately to do the right thing. He didn’t ignore advice. He followed advice.

Landsberg: What do you think about the role of the Academic Council over the years? It sounds as though you’re critical of its role under President Atchley?

Rohwer: Yes. It turned into an open warfare with the administration, which was really unfortunate. The Academic Council before that, as far as I was concerned was fine. As I’d say, we didn’t tend to – but when I was on it, I was on the executive committee. I was down there – they had a five person executive committee that met more frequently.
Landsberg: When were you on the Academic Council?

Rohwer: I don’t know, sometime in the ‘70s.

Landsberg: What kinds of issues were you confronting at that time?

Rohwer: There isn’t anything that stands out as being remarkable. We were presenting faculty ideas to people like Judy Chambers, who was the Vice President for student affairs or something like that. She had her finger on a lot of the administrative decisions for the University. She was a sort of a mover and a shaker down there. The Academic Council responded when requested for information or assistance by the administration. It was a cooperative arrangement and there weren’t any big contentious issues that we were involved with in those years that I can recall.

Landsberg: How did it change then? What do you think prompted it to change?

Rohwer: [Jed] Skip Scully. I think [Jed] Skip Scully was the biggest mover and shaker of that change. He became the Chairman of the Academic Council. He was the one who didn’t want to see the University be taken off probation because he had a lot more bargaining role when they were on probation. They had to do what the Academic Council wanted in order to get off probation.

Landsberg: He was a McGeorge professor?

Rohwer: Yes. He certainly was. He got the job on the Academic Council because he went up and down the hall and told everybody he wanted it. Before that we’d always had to browbeat into somebody into taking it. We really had to sit down and put our heads together and say, “Who hasn’t had this job? Okay, it’s your turn.” You were one, right?

Landsberg: Yes, yes.

Rohwer: We came to you and say, “Brian, you got to do it.” And you said, “I don’t really want to.” And we said, “We need you. You got to do it.” Everyone who went down there was dragooned into taking the job, until Skip went around and said, “I want it.” It’s like, “Jesus alright, you want it? It’s yours!” When they did a five year
review of Jerry Caplan, one of the members of the committee – I was on the committee – one of the members of the committee was a woman professor from Stockton. I can’t remember her name. We had various people who wanted to present their ideas to us, so we met with them. One of them was Skip. He, among other things, talked about the bizarre practices in hiring and the bizarre practices for sabbaticals, and how terrible it was and how Caplan was a terrible dean. When he left, she said, ‘Well, this is certainly some things to consider.” I said, “Let me tell you some facts. His wife and he went on sabbatical at the same time. They wanted to go to London and she wanted to go work in the court. She had the project all lined up. He wanted to go over there and do something, but he’d decide what he was going to do after he got there.” And she said, “What?” And I said, “That’s right.” Then I said, “The Dean said “no”, he had to decide what he was going to do before he left.” And he refused. They went back and forth on this for six months. Finally the Dean kind of caved in. That’s the bizarre sabbatical practice that he’s talking about. She said, “Well my goodness, that’s terrible.” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “Well, somehow you ought to have let people in Stockton know these things.” That was a very telling comment because what she was telling me is that he was blasting the law school every opportunity he had down there. I picked that up from other people too and its...Anyhow, the relationship between the administration and the Academic Counsel went to hell in a handbasket.

Landsberg: Did you serve on any other University committees over the years?

Rohwer: Did he?

Landsberg: Did you.

Rohwer: Oh, yes. The International Studies Committee. Margee Ensign was the woman in Stockton who was in charge of the international programs. Since I was in charge at McGeorge, it was a very natural thing that we ought to start working together. They had a bizarre financing scheme where they allocated so much money to students who were going to go overseas for a semester. They allocated the same amount of money, no matter how many students went, and no matter what schools they went to. So if you sent three students to Oxford that took up
the whole budget. If you send a half a dozen to a school in southern Europe or Africa, or some place will lower costs that only ate a portion of the budget. The more students you took, the less money there was because the budget was not fixed on the basis of per capita; it was fixed on the basis of this is how much you got and no more.

Landsberg: How did that system get established?

Rohwer: The treasurer down there, you know, was a lawyer and he was the kind of guy who came to all of McGeorge functions. He was a wonderful friend. He and I got along just beautifully. I argued with him about this system of financing more times, and he’d say, “Yeah, you’re right, but that’s the way we do it.” I just could never get through to him that they ought to do something on a per capita basis.

Landsberg: Who was that? Was that Pat?

Rohwer: Pat.

Landsberg: Pat Cavanaugh?

Rohwer: Pat Cavanaugh, certainly yes. Pat was a great friend to the law school. He’s a wonderful guy. I like him.

Landsberg: He’s a lawyer I think.

Rohwer: He’s a lawyer. I like him very, very much, despite the fact that he’s a lawyer. The one thing we disagreed on was this international program financing. We just didn’t ever come to see eye to eye on that one.

Landsberg: Did the committee function for very long? Do you know if it’s still...?

Rohwer: I don’t know if it’s still in existence. In fact, I don’t know what’s become of Ms. Ensign. [She is now running a university in Africa]

Landsberg: Well, she went to Africa.

Rohwer: It strikes me in my background that she went off to some other project. Do you know?
Landsberg: I think she went to Africa.

Rohwer: Okay, okay. She was a very wonderful person – seemed to be a very highly qualified person. She was in charge of the foreign students coming too – not in charge of, but she was overlooking that the appropriate programs were being handled for the foreign students who were coming to Stockton. She was in charge of Stockton students going overseas.

Landsberg: Did you have relationships with the Regents?

Rohwer: When the Regents met on the Sacramento campus, Gordon would have me report to them on international programs. But no I didn’t have any. It was nothing too close.

Landsberg: Some of them former students of yours?

Rohwer: Yes and some of them I knew from law practice and stuff. I’m trying to think of the attorney who was the lieutenant governor of California. He’s an attorney from Stockton or Modesto. He was on the Board of Regents. He was Chair of the Board of Regents for a while. I can’t remember.

Landsberg: Okay, well let’s talk a little bit more about students.

Rohwer: Pardon me. That was a guy who was a candidate for President when McCaffery was selected. I was on the committee that selected McCaffrey for President. It was the former lieutenant governor who was in that competition and he was sailing high at a meeting with the Academic Council, some of the other members of the faculty down there, and our selection committee. He was sailing high until I said to him, “You know we have a legal clinic that handles legal aid cases for low income people at McGeorge. Some other schools will run into the problem where the clinic represents people who have a problem with a big business or local business that’s a contributor to the school. They are causing troubles for this business, so the business comes to you as President of the University and says, ‘Look what your legal aid society is doing. Look at the trouble they’re causing us.’ And what would be your reaction in that situation?” He said, “I’d talk to the people. I presume you have reasonable people in your legal aid
society. I’d talk to them and explain the problem to them.” I said, “What outcome do you expect?” He said, “I’d expect them to stop if they wanted to keep working for the University.” Everybody in the whole room went [*phfttt*?]. That was the end of him. Everybody came up afterwards and said look at what you did. It was a very dramatic moment.

Landsberg: When did we start having a clinic?

Rohwer: It was Carol Miller who first ran it. She became the Dean’s girlfriend. They named a court house after her.

Landsberg: She was a justice?

Rohwer: No superior court judge.

Landsberg: Superior court judge.

Rohwer: Anyway, she was the first director of the clinic. That would have been in the ‘70s I believe. It was pretty early. Again, it was a fairly new idea at that time. Gordon was always out in front, coming home with new ideas. Elizabeth Rindskopf Parker repeated this story from Norm Redlich, the famous Dean of NYU that Redlich told her that Gordon Schaber was the smartest dean he ever met.

Landsberg: That’s something.

Rohwer: That is something because he met them all.

Landsberg: So did you have any involvement with the clinic?

Rohwer: Not really, no. When the first director went on the bench, Glee Scully took it over. She ran it for a lot of years.

Landsberg: Was she a former student of yours?

Rohwer: Yes. Glendalee Garfield, she was in those days. Also Carol Miller, who was a McGeorge student.

Landsberg: So you’ve seen a lot of your students go on to other…?
Rohwer: Oh yes. She was a good student.

Landsberg: You’ve had several of your students probably become teachers here, besides Glee.

Rohwer: Yes, Ron Robie — well a whole raft of them, yes. Many of them graduated from McGeorge.

Landsberg: They all had you.

Rohwer: Just about, yes. They could get through with ... I taught agency ... agency or contracts or an elective in sales, I usually picked up most of them. Or a UCC elective, Uniform Commercial Code.

Landsberg: I recall that there used to be a student newspaper.

Rohwer: Oh, yes.

Landsberg: You want to talk about that? Called The Dialog?

Rohwer: The Dialog. The student newspaper was — I was sorry to see it go. It was a handy thing for communicating with students and people tended to read it. It went up and down and sideways. There were periods of time when it tried to pick a fight with the administration. There were periods of times when it was kind of fluffy and airheaded, but by in large I thought it was a good addition to the campus. It gave outlet for people to write a letter to the editor about what was bugging them and so forth. Probably this goes on quite a bit by email among the students now or Facebook or whatever they use.

Landsberg: Why did it stop?

Rohwer: I don’t know why it stopped. I don’t know.

Landsberg: Were students too busy?

Rohwer: I imagine it stopped because of lack of interest in students to take it over.
Landsberg: Right, right. Let’s see... what else about students. It used to be, I think that at the end of a school year, first year classes had sort of a wild last day of class.

Rohwer: A wild last day of class, yes. I didn’t have anything directly to do with that, but I had the last class. I was a recipient of that. They’d get a keg of beer and march into the classroom with a keg of beer on a dolly and a bunch of cups. It was impossible to stop them. One year they showed up with a bunch of mixers and made...

Landsberg: Margaritas?

Rohwer: No, I think they were... I don’t know. It was some mixed drink. I forget what it was. In any event, we had an important class where I was going to review stuff that needed reviewing. When they showed up with all the mixers, I just said, “For those who want to hear the final lecture in contracts, we’re moving over to – and I found an empty classroom – and I just picked up and moved and left. Half of them stayed there with the mixers and the other half came with me to the final lecture.

Landsberg: Did they give you gifts sometimes?

Rohwer: Jokes, yes. Nothing serious, I don’t think. Oh yes, I got thrown in the hospital for a misdiagnosis. They thought I had a blood clot and didn’t. So I was in the hospital overnight, but in the process I missed an evening contracts class. So they gave me a very nice big ficus plant as a get well present.

Landsberg: I had some recollection of a pig.

Rohwer: Oh god, yes. Yes, they presented me with a pig one time. I made the mistake of taking it home. My wife fell in love with the pig. We had to get rid of the pig. It’s a pig you know. So I gave it back to the student who had been the ring leader of all this and when he slaughtered the pig, he brought me a bunch of frozen pork chops and stuff. I made the mistake of the century taking them home. It caused quite a crisis in our household. I was going to eat Wilbur.
Landsberg: So the school really has evolved, has grown from a very small school to a very large school. Now it’s contracted, but still a major actor. When you started here, what did you think was going to happen? Or did you even think about it?

Rohwer: When I first started, I didn’t think about it at all. It was, “Do you want to teach contracts?” “Sure, I’d like to teach contracts. Sounds like fun.” When I came here full time, I look back on the decision. I had just become a partner in Downey Brand, the biggest law firm in town then. I left to become a professor at an unaccredited law school, which has to be the bonehead decision of all time, but it didn’t turn out to be boneheaded. I was anticipating where we were going. It was just quite obvious being around Schaber that we weren’t going to be spinning our wheels. We’re going to be doing things. Let me give you an example of the kind of thing Gordon did. Way into the international program, Gordon decides we needed an international board of advisors. I have no idea what he used, but he went about picking attorneys around the world to be on our international board of advisors. The Spaniard he picked later became President of the International Bar Association. He just died recently, Fernando Pombo. The two Taiwanese he picked, one of them became President of the Taipei Bar and the other one became President of the Taiwan Bar. The Englishman that he picked became a senior partner in one of the major firms in London. The Dutchman that he picked is still with us and Von den Musenberg is a leading EU lawyer. He picked two from Italy who have stuck with us all the way and are excellent lawyers in Italy. How did he find these people? How did he identify them, pinpoint them? That’s the kind of thing he was capable of doing.

Landsberg: You’ve worked closely with the international advisors over the years.

Rohwer: Oh yes, I’ve been on it.

Landsberg: What do you think it’s accomplished? What’s been its function for the school?

Rohwer: Its function has been to give advice on business law courses and international courses that we should be offering. It’s to give advice on
opportunities to work with government agencies that we wouldn’t have otherwise thought of. It has given us an annual come together to tell people what we’re doing with international, which requires you to kind of pull together all your assets and resources and say, “What have we been doing for the last twelve months?” It meets every other year in Europe and provides a base for a European alumni gathering, which picks up thirty or forty people … of attorneys in Europe who were McGeorge alums. Some from the J.D. program, many of them from the LL.M. program. It’s provided us with good publicity. When you’ve got the president of the International Bar Association assigned to your alumni advisory board – the International Bar Association is a big deal in foreign countries. It’s been very worthwhile.

Landsberg: There is a meeting.

Rohwer: There is a meeting, okay. Do you know when it is?

Landsberg: In March.

Rohwer: It’s not on the calendar.

Landsberg: It’s in March.

Rohwer: Okay, I’ll have to find out when that’s going to be. Where is it? Is it here again?

Landsberg: Here.

Rohwer: They stopped going to Europe. I guess it’s because of the expense and I can understand that. Some of them have been significant financial contributors, some of them not. As the Italians said, “We don’t get to write it off our income tax. You people don’t pay much income tax anyway.” (laughs). Anyhow, I think that they’ve been a very worthwhile addition to the operation.

Landsberg: Gordon also created a board of visitors for this law school as a whole, right?

Rohwer: Yes.
Landsberg: He had some very prestigious people on that.

Rohwer: Yes, he did. I really didn’t work directly with them. I’m not the best source of history for that.

Landsberg: Okay, I think...

Rohwer: You probably know more about that than I do. In fact, the next time we meet here, I ought to be interviewing you, right. (laughs)

Landsberg: Well, we’ll see (laughs). What about the relationship between McGeorge and the city of Sacramento – the community, the relationships especially in Oak Park. Do you have any comments about that?

Rohwer: Well that was Gordon. He took a direct interest in Oak Park, getting some attention from the city council, which for a long time it didn’t have.

Landsberg: Oak Park is... how would you describe Oak Park?

Rohwer: Oak Park was a primarily Portuguese community that was a suburb of Sacramento. There was a streetcar line that ran from Sacramento out to Oak Park. Oak Park had an amusement park and on Saturday...

Landsberg: Joyland.

Rohwer: On Saturday the thing to do was to get the train and go out to Oak Park and take the kids to the amusement operations there. Somewhere along the line in the ‘30s, Oak Park began to – Oak Park was a thriving, proud community – somewhere along the ‘30s Oak Park began to deteriorate. The people who lived here tended to die off or to move. One of my fraternity brothers who’s from Sacramento, Paul Manolis Olis, his family owned the house right next to the faculty parking lot here on 34th street. 33rd or 34th, I can’t tell. They merged together; I don’t remember what number carries on.

Landsberg: It was 34th.

Rohwer: In any event, the place deteriorated. It became a black ghetto. During the period around the early ‘70s, there were riots. They had policemen shot and
snipers up on the roof of a building on 35th street shooting down in the police cars, killing the policemen driving the police cars. We had bullets come through the windows of the law school that embedded themselves in the wall of the men’s john there, next to the library. Things were tough. The school itself was located in one of the worst, in terms of buildings, one of the worst areas of the whole. Gordon was involved in pushing city fathers to do something about this. Gordon was involved in a hell of a lot of things. He was chairman of the planning commission, county planning commission. He was chairman of the Sacramento county democratic central committee. He was a Superior Court judge and after two years he was selected as the judge of the year for the State of California. He was picked as presiding judge. Sacramento had a backlog of about four to five years that it took to get to trial. When Gordon Schaber was chief judge for a year that was reduced to eighteen months. People were complaining that cases were going to trial before they could get ready. It was fabulous.

His impact on the community was just something to behold. If you were running for public office, you went out to McGeorge and talked to Gordon Schaber and got his blessing. It meant a lot. He was busy. He knew how to make himself known to people in ways that would blow you over. He was on a corporate board of directors and he met Conrad Hilton. Conrad Hilton decided that this was the smartest guy he knew and so while he had his Los Angeles law firm that represented him, when it came time to pick up another hotel or merge, he got Gordon down there to give him advice. He was putting together a merger with a small little hotel chain and the weekend they going to meet at a hotel in Los Angeles. The state democratic council was meeting that same weekend in Los Angeles, and Gordon was chairman of the Sacramento County Central Committee, which was one of the major counties of course. So Gordon had to be in two places, which is difficult to do. So he took a noon recess from his meeting with Conrad Hilton and his friends and jumped in a cab and went over to where the democratic convention was being held. He told the cab driver, wait right here. I’ll be right back. And he went toddling with his cane to the place where the head table – it was a huge long head table like you have at democratic conventions and it was on a raised platform – and he hobbled up the stairs and went down the
whole platform, stopping and talking to each one of them. He went down the
stairs on the other end and ran around the back, got back in the cab, and went
back to Hilton. He said, “Three months later, people were saying ‘Gosh I saw you
there at the convention. I wanted to talk to you and I was never able to run you
down.’” Everybody knew that Gordon was there. He had just paraded in front of
them. You can say what you want about him, but he knew how to let people
know that he was there.

Landsberg: Well that brings us I think to Raymond Burr. Can you talk about
Raymond Burr and Gordon Schaber?

Rohwer: The Perry Mason series, in its early days, had the worst offenses to
criminal justice procedures you ever saw in your life. Seymour Berger, the DA
would call the defendant to the witness stand and say, “Hey, you son of a gun!
Where were you last Thursday night?” They were just – it was terrible. The Los
Angeles bar got on their back for being the worst PR for trial procedure. Erle
Stanley Gardner, who was the author of the Perry Mason series, said, “I want a
lawyer. You want to get the thing more conforming with criminal procedures.
Why don’t you get me some experts to assist me? So Los Angeles Bar said, “It’s a
deal.” And they provided a rotating group of attorneys to come in and help Erle
Stanley Gardner. If you watched the last half of the Perry Mason series, Perry
Mason is saying, “Pardon me your honor, I’d like to call this witness out of order. I
know this is irregular, but he has a such and such.” It’s a lesson, almost a lesson
on criminal procedure. The American Bar Association presented Erle Stanley
Gardner with the award for his contribution to public understanding of criminal
procedure. Never to miss out, Gordon in

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him. Burr picks up Gordon as his attorney. When Burr fell on his hard times with no more Perry Mason, alcohol, and stuff, he got into a real bad financial bind. Gordon loaned him a pot full of money. Gordon oversaw the sales of the Orchid Farm in the Azores and of his south Pacific Island and the sales of mansions in Beverley Hills. Then the Ironside program came on, which would be Burr’s salvation. Every one of the Ironside scripts was approved by Gordon. He edited them as he saw fit. When they made a change while they were filming in Montreal, Burr refused to go on until they got Gordon there. Gordon had to get on a plane to fly to Montreal to go over the changes in the script that they wanted to make. He would go over to Burr’s house in Santa Rosa and visit. Burr would come here and made a movie on the courthouse of the future and gave us all that artwork. He was just the most regular guy you’d ever want to meet. It was just like meeting Brian Landsberg. He was just a wonderful, easy-going fellow. And that’s the story of Raymond Burr.

Landsberg: So he was a good friend of the school?

Rohwer: Oh, absolutely - a wonderful friend of the school. He’d do anything Gordon asked him to do.

Landsberg: That’s great.

Rohwer: I was never at his house personally. I talked to him personally quite a bit when he was here. He grew up right around the corner from where my mother grew up in Vallejo. They were from Canada, but he grew up in Vallejo. In any event, Gordon told a story that he would have dinner parties over at his place in Santa Rosa and he’d have this special wine. He’d wipe out your glass to have the next special wine. Then you have the another wine, and then at dinner there was a carafe of red wine. Then there was the after dinner special bottle of wine. Why the carafe wine? Because it was Gallo Hearty Burgundy, and he thought that was the best dinner wine. He knew his friends wouldn’t approve of him serving Gallo Hearty Burgundy, so he served it in a carafe (laughs).

Landsberg: Good story. So, have you seen changes in the students over the years – the way that they learn, their attitudes?
Rohwer: Their level of hard work went down several years ago.

Landsberg: And why is that?

Rohwer: I don’t know. I don’t think it started with us. I think it started on the undergraduate campus. Students used to all finish college in four years. Now they talk about the graduation rate after six years and it’s still not very high. There is a comfort with being a professional student and not getting anywhere in a hurry, that I think has caused a deterioration on our whole higher education process. Our schools used to be so much better than the European schools at the university level, in terms of expecting students to work. Europe hasn’t gotten any better I guess, but I think we’ve slipped. As I said, I don’t think that was the law school’s doing. I think that’s the change in what’s coming in the front door.

Landsberg: So did it affect the way you taught them?

Rohwer: No. No.

Landsberg: Or the way you graded them?

Rohwer: No, it didn’t. But it made it a little bit harder to – their paper qualifications went up at McGeorge. We got better students over the period of the ‘80s and ‘90s than we’d had in the ’60s and into the early ‘70s. I think there’s been a change.

Landsberg: I guess change is always inevitable.

Rohwer: It’s inevitable.

Landsberg: It’s the way of the world.

Rohwer: I don’t think this was a change for the better. European Universities are fascinating. I’ve never attended one, but I’ve sure had a lot of family and friends who have. My boy, Eric Pope said that the Americans there were the only ones who cracked the books and studied. He said that the Germans are all out carrying signs about how they need more money. They don’t take any exams. They had special exams for the Americans because the American schools required them to
bring back a grade. But the German students didn’t have an exam until the end of four years. That doesn’t tend to produce hard study.

Landsberg: So Claude, what would you say you’re most proud of about your career?

Rohwer: Vietnam, Vietnam. I got some plaques on my wall at home that thank me for my contribution to the development of the legal systems of Vietnam. I’ve got them from the Ministry of Justice, from the Ministry of Commerce and Trade, and from the Vietnamese Bar Association and that’s kind of nice.

Landsberg: That’s terrific. What about at McGeorge itself?

Rohwer: I don’t know. I was here in the wonderful period of years, but fortuitously I just started at a wonderful time and came through it. If I had started two years later, Kennedy would have been teaching contracts. It was just a wonderful ride. There was high point after high point. We moved at a pace that was hard to believe. It was really a wonderful experience.

Landsberg: So there was a huge event marking your retirement. What can you say about that?

Rohwer: Well that’s because Tony Kennedy agreed to come out and give a speech, so everybody came to hear Kennedy.

Landsberg: Yes, where was it held?

Rohwer: The Memorial Auditorium. The Barbershoppers came to sing for it and as one of the Barbershoppers said, “It was just a group of five-hundred of Claude’s intimate friends.” My friend Tom Shephard from Stockton said, “That’s the best retirement party I ever went to.” It was a good one. My daughter gave the best speech of anybody I thought.

Landsberg: Who else spoke?

Rohwer: Well, the master of ceremonies was Morrison England, the senior federal district court judge here.
Landsberg: And former Regent?

Rohwer: And former Regent. Is it former? He’s not on the Regents anymore?

Landsberg: Well, he was a Regent. I don’t know whether he still is.

Rohwer: I don’t know where he is or not. Morrison is just an absolutely wonderful guy. He still reminds me that the first class, I called on him and I called him Mr. English. And he said “It’s England,” and you said, “I won’t forget that.” He said, “You didn’t.” Evidently, I said it in a rather threatening manner. Joe Gensheea was the speaker and Joe’s a prominent Sacramento attorney and he was at Downey Brand when I was there. He got up and told some delightful stories about the old days. As I said, my daughter gave a hell of a speech. DeRosa was there, the University President and Kennedy and his wife. Kennedy gave a totally personal speech – it was stories about antics that he and I had pulled off together and some things that we had done together and good times that we had had and so forth. It was a fun evening.

Landsberg: What year was that?

Rohwer: ’96. Somewhere around there. Oh, no, no, no. It was in...

Landsberg: 2010?

Rohwer: Yes, no a little before that.


Rohwer: There you go, yes. I taught for a couple pf years after that, but that was the retirement. Barbara Thomas, again, she was the mover and shaker for that whole thing. Everything Barbara touched got moved and shaken.

Landsberg: Yes. So I think I’ve covered a lot, but I don’t know if I’ve gotten it all. So I’m wondering whether you’ve gotten anything else you’d like to talk about.

Rohwer: It seems like we’ve exhausted the waterfront.
Landsberg: I had a question about the order of the coif. So what is the order of the coif and how did McGeorge become a member of the Order of the Coif. You were a member already probably from your law school at – you went to the University of California.

Rohwer: A number of us were Order of the Coif as students. Order of the Coif is a group of schools – Yale is the only one that belongs that kind of disowns it, they don’t give out Order of the Coif to the students because all of the students at Yale are all top. That’s what they say. The group started with Ivy League schools. It picked up schools like Stanford. When we became a member of Order of the Coif, there were I think 65 schools in it, out of 160 law schools or something like that in the country. So it was a fairly selective group. You applied. There were whole books full of information. We had just gotten AALS accreditation – the American Association of Law Schools accreditation. So we had just been through a process that had binders of information about the school that had been put together. We’d already hired our visiting librarian for the month of June – and things like that. So we didn’t have to do much special preparation for Order of the Coif. We were voted into membership. I don’t know how much this was a vote on Gordon Schaber and how much it was a vote on the school, but....

[end of tape]