

**Transcription of Video Oral History Interview with
OLIVER A. JOHNSON**

July 30, 1998

Erickson: Good morning Professor Johnson.

Johnson: Good morning.

Erickson: Would you begin by telling us where you were born and a little about your family, please?

Johnson: Oh, sure. I was born in Everett, Washington, in February, 1923. My mother said I was born in a snow storm. My father suffered from bronchitis and that was not very good for him, so when I was two years old, the family moved to San Diego.

I am of Swedish descent on both sides of my family. My father was born in Minnesota and my mother in Sweden. She came to America when she was 21, arriving at Ellis Island.

We bought a little ranch in Lemon Grove, just east of San Diego. Then about 1928, my father planted an avocado orchard on that property and to the best of my knowledge, that was the first avocado orchard planted in the Greater San Diego area. So you might say that my father is the Father of the San Diego Avocado Industry.

We moved from Lemon Grove in 1931 to East San Diego, 35th and El Cajon. We lived at 35th and El Cajon for a year and a half, and I went to Edison School.

That was a very happy time because there were lots of kids. I remember my folks went up to Los Angeles on a trip to visit my father's sister and her family. They came back from Los Angeles and when they drove up, there were 24 kids in our back yard.

(chuckle)

Erickson: Oh, my goodness.

Johnson: My brother Dave was very gifted—well, he was an artist and even as a teenager, he wanted to build things and to do it authentically. He made adobe bricks from the dirt in the back yard, heavy dark dirt. He made the bricks himself and he made a replica of the San Diego de Alcala Mission in our back yard.

Erickson: Oh, my goodness. All by himself.

Johnson: All by himself. That was my brother Dave. My oldest brother Ed—he was always running off somewhere. He would go here and he would go there. We didn't see him too much. Well, they are both gone now. My brother Ed died, drowned actually, up in Oregon in 1954 and Dave died of cancer in the early '80s.

Erickson: So you had two brothers.

Johnson: No, I had three. Those two are gone and then I have a younger brother who lives in Turlock right now. He's a retired Baptist minister. And a sister who lives in Turlock also. She's married and lives there, and her husband has an almond orchard. So I have the two siblings in Turlock. I very rarely see them. We don't have very much in common because they are quite religious, those two, and of course as you can probably realize, I am not. So we really don't have a great deal in common. I rarely ever see my siblings in Turlock.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: But of course my children... Do you want to hear about my children?

Erickson: I sure do. Well, first tell us how you and Carol met, or where you met.

Johnson: Oh. In an music appreciation course when we were both undergraduates at Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon.

Johnson: This would be in 1942. We were in the class together. That's where we met.

And after her sophomore year at Linfield, she left Linfield and went to Whitman. *Her parents had her transfer there to get her away from me, who clearly had no future.* She graduated from Whitman in 1944 with a major in History.

In 1943, I had to leave Linfield to be called up to active duty in the Navy. From Oregon, I went to Topeka, Kansas. And that's where, of course, I went on board a ship in Topeka, Kansas, aboard a battleship right in the middle of the ocean there in Topeka. And so I was very much of a sailor in Topeka, Kansas. It was so hot I nearly died. After Oregon, Topeka ... it was a wasteland.

(chuckle)

Johnson: God, we hated Topeka. But I stayed in Topeka for four months, got one semester, and with the credits I got out of the school in Topeka, I was able to get a Linfield degree.

I was granted that degree at Commencement in May of 1944 from Linfield, but since I was on board a ship in the Chesapeake Bay at the time, my father, who was preaching in Cherry Grove, Oregon, not too far from Linfield, went down and got my degree for me. He was pleased to pick up my degree.

In the meanwhile, I had spent four months in New York City in Midshipman's School at Columbia and got my commission. We were commissioned at a ceremony in a magnificent church. I don't know whether you've ever been to the Cathedral of St. John The Divine in New York? I graduated number 20 in a class of 800.

Erickson: No, I haven't seen it.

Johnson: Well, it's the largest Gothic cathedral in the world, although it doesn't date from the Middle Ages. It was built in the late 19th

Johnson: century, and is in fact, not quite complete today (or wasn't quite complete when we were there a few years ago).

They opened the great big doors, which they very rarely open for us midshipmen to parade in for the commissioning ceremony and parade out. Of course, there were lots of spectators watching this ceremony. *There is a bronze plaque in the cathedral today commemorating these commissioning ceremonies.*

During the war, the local New Yorkers in that area ... they liked to watch the midshipmen parading out in the streets.

We would have a Sunday night service, a Vesper Service, where we would march from John Jay Hall there on the Columbia University campus, 116th Street between Amsterdam and Broadway. We would march up to the ... what's the name of the cathedral, up near Grant's Tomb? I remember, it's called simply the Riverside Church.

We would go there for Sunday night services, and we would sing. One of the features of that service was the Chaplain would read the names of those lost and missing who had been graduates of the Midshipman's School at Columbia.

We were the sixteenth class, and we would listen to see what class numbers they were from. If they were from the second or third class, we wouldn't feel so badly. When he would say twelfth or thirteenth class, then we would get the jitters.

Erickson: You would know them, uh huh.

Johnson: From there we went to Norfolk and did our amphibious training, got out of there and headed across down through the Caribbean, stopped at Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. Naval Station in Cuba, which the United States still maintains as far as I know. Went across the Caribbean sea, which was terribly rough and I got sea sick. Stopped at Colon (Columbus) in Panama, went through the Panama Canal and stopped at

Johnson: Balboa, which by the way, is east of Colon even though it's on the Pacific and Colon is on the Atlantic.

Then 36 days without any sight of land across the Pacific landing at Espirito Santo in the New Hebrides Islands. Spent a few days at Espirito Santo, then sailed up the Manus in the Admiralties. Spent a few days in Manus, then Hollandia, New Guinea.

One interesting thing we did. General MacArthur had his headquarters just outside of Hollandia. We loaded aboard a walk-in refrigerator at Manus and transported it to Hollandia for General MacArthur, so he had a walk-in refrigerator.

(chuckle)

And then we went from Hollandia for the invasion of the Philippine Islands at Leyte. We landed at Leyte Island on October 24, 1943. (pause) I was trying to remember if I got my dates right.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: As a result, we participated ... in fact, we were the focal point of the biggest naval battle in world history—the Battle of Leyte Gulf. This was an extremely interesting battle. It took over two days, and there were four distinct battles: the Surigao Straits Battle, the Sibuyan Sea Battle, the Battle off Cape Engãnyo and the Battle off Samar—all naval battles.

They were fought over an area of thousands of square miles. We were the target of a Japanese pincer movement. They were having two fleets that were going to come, one up from the south and one down from the north, and come in on Leyte Gulf as pincers and destroy all the shipping, of which we were a part in the Leyte Gulf and then destroy the landing forces (Army landing forces) that had just gone ashore on Leyte.

Erickson: How many other ships were there with yours?

Johnson: Oh, maybe a couple of hundred. Oh yeh, a big landing force. And the Japanese were thwarted by two very ... well three or four ways I'll have to say—American naval counter maneuvers.

First of all, as the Japanese fleet from Singapore and Brunei Bay was steaming west through the Sibuyan Sea enroute to the San Bernardino Straights to come down on the northern pincer, Admiral Halsey sent out airplanes from his Third Fleet which was at sea in the Philippine Sea, east of Samar. They attacked the Japanese fleet in the Sibuyan Sea, which is in the central Philippines between Mindanao and Samar. There are a lot of little islands in there.

Halsey's planes succeeded in sinking the super battleship, The Musashi. The Japanese had two super battleships: The Musashi and the Yamato, and they were both in that fleet, which was a big battle fleet.

Well, the Americans attacked that fleet, and they just overwhelmed the Musashi. I think they had 200 airplanes—torpedo planes and dive bombers and so on. They got the Musashi but not the Yamato.

Admiral Kurita, who was the commander of the Japanese force continued westward through the San Bernardino Straights and headed south to go into the Leyte Gulf to wipe us out.

In the meanwhile, Admirals Nishimura and Shima were in charge of two fleets of old battleships and cruisers coming west from the Palawan and Brunei Bay areas through the Sulu Sea, through the Mindanao Sea and then up through the Surigao Straits.

Here was fought one of the most famous naval battles in history. As the Japanese came up through the Surigao Straits, they were attacked by American PT boats. I can still remember those PT boats heading out from Tacloban Air Strip at Leyte. They were moored just off the air strip, and we were on the beach right next to them. They went roaring out with their torpedoes, and we said there must be something going on south

Johnson: of us. They went down and attacked the Japanese fleet, and of course, they were no match for the Japanese battleships and cruisers with their big guns. They just brushed the PT boats aside, although the fact is that the PT boats fired torpedoes at them, but they didn't hit them.

Erickson: Umm.

Johnson: The Japanese battle fleet kept moving north. They had two fleets, one behind the other. As Nishimura moved north up the Surigao Straits (it was very constricted water, only three or four miles wide), he had to steam his fleet in a column.

The American destroyers came down and fired torpedoes into the Japanese fleet as they came up the Straits and inflicted a great deal of damage. I don't know how much damage they inflicted, but they damaged and sank a lot of the Japanese ships of Nishimura's fleet. But Shima was far enough behind and escaped.

When the destroyers got done with the Japanese ships, they retreated back and Admiral Oldendorf with his battleships and heavy cruisers opened fire. And that's where he crossed the "T" if you know what that means?

Erickson: (nodding negatively)

Johnson: Ok. You've got the American fleet steaming across the top of the Straits this way. The Japanese fleet is coming up this way in a column, and toward the Americans. Nishimura realizes he is steaming into a trap, so he turns and he makes a mistake. Instead of ordering a flank turn, he orders a column turn. Do you know the difference?

Erickson: No.

Johnson: No. Ok. If he'd ordered a flank turn, all the ships would have turned and retreated at once. He ordered a column turn instead, which meant that each ship would come to a point and turn and follow back.

Johnson: As each ship came up on its column turn and made its turn, it was facing broadside against the Americans, and the Americans simply opened fire on them and sank them. They fired right down on these big Japanese battleships. And of course, they had the range on them. They could fire longer. They sank them all, almost all. Only the Mogami, one of the heavy cruisers, escaped.

As they were fleeing, the Japanese saw the Nashi, one of the two Japanese battleships ... they saw it, and they thought there were two ships, but it was the Nashi that had been blown in half and the two halves were floating down the bay separately.

Erickson: My goodness.

Johnson: It was awful. And the next morning American naval planes chased the retreating Japanese fleet and sank them, so I don't think any of them escaped. Well in the meanwhile and while all this was going on, the most exciting and scary part of the whole battle took place.

It was a trick. The Japanese knew Halsey was after carriers, so they sent Admiral Ozawa down from the home waters of Japan to an area just northwest of Luzon off a place called Cape Engãno. He sent out planes for Halsey's reconnaissance aircraft to spot, which Halsey's aircraft spotted, and of course, recognized them as reconnaissance planes. He knew they were coming from some war ships which would be nearby. So Halsey said, "Let's go get them. They're carriers. Go get those carriers." Halsey always wanted to sink carriers. It was the carrier that replaced the battleship as the most important naval ship.

So Halsey and his entire fleet steamed like crazy north to Cape Engãno. This was Bull Halsey's famous run—and mistake. This is exactly what Ozawa wanted. He wanted to lure Halsey's fleet north way up there so that Kurita, with his battle fleet, could go through the San Bernardino Straights behind Halsey and swing down to Leyte and destroy all of us.

Johnson: We were the victims. So Halsey went steaming up north, and he did catch Ozawa's fleet and attacked them and proceeded to sink them.

But in the meanwhile, Admiral Kincaid, who was the admiral in charge of the Seventh Fleet ... and that was the fleet which was in charge of the landings on Leyte ... was waiting in vain for Halsey's support.

Here Kincaid was with his jeep (or auxiliary) carriers. He had eighteen jeep carriers: Taffy I, Taffy II, Taffy III—three fleets of six each. They were off the west coast of Samar, and their job had been to cover the landings on Leyte. Also they were the ones who sent up the planes that had sunk Nishimura's ships in the Surigao Straights the day before.

Well, the first thing Kincaid knew, he thought that Halsey had left some of his fleet off the San Bernardino Straights just in case Kurita would come through. He was mistaken. Halsey thought that Kurita had retreated—but Kurita was fooling him. *He had retreated only temporarily and was again returning to the battles.*

With the sinking of the Musashi in the Sibuyan Sea, Kurita turned and retreated to the east, back toward Mindoro. But during the night, he turned around and came west again, came through the San Bernardino Straights, and the first thing the Americans knew that there were any Japanese forces in the area was when one of the lookouts on a Taffy Jeep Carrier saw the Pagoda superstructure of a Japanese battleship coming up over the horizon east of Samar.

Of course, the Japanese ships were faster than the Jeep Carriers. The carriers could do a top speed of about 17 knots whereas the Japanese battleships could do approximately 22. So the Japanese fleet was rapidly overtaking the American Jeep Carriers. The Americans made smoke trying to disguise themselves and hide themselves behind smoke. They dodged

Johnson: into a rain squall which hid them for a while, but the rain moved on.

Then they sent out destroyers. There were three of them: The Roberts, The Hole and the Johnston. They were ordered to attack the Japanese fleet. The Americans sent destroyers out to attack Japanese battleships and cruisers, which was a bit of an unequal contest, but the American destroyers and destroyer escorts surged full speed ahead right into the Japanese fleet firing torpedoes as they went, then also firing their five inch gun. The American destroyers had several five inch guns, but they were nothing compared to the eighteen inch cannons of the Japanese battleships.

Anyway, the American destroyers attacked and Commander Evans, the commander of the Hole, sailed his destroyer right between two columns of Japanese battleships and cruisers launching torpedoes on both sides.

The other captains were doing the same, firing their five inch guns at the Japanese as well. The American destroyers were so small and so close that the Japanese could not lower their eighteen inch rifles to fire on them. When they fired at them, the shells would go over them. So the Americans managed to fire torpedoes at various of the Japanese ships, and I believe sank or damaged three Japanese cruisers.

In the meanwhile, airmen from Jeep Carriers took off and bombed the Japanese ships, and when they ran out of bombs, they simply strafed them with their fifty millimeter cannon. They were strafing Japanese battleships that had heavy armor with fifty millimeter canon, and of course, the shells would hit the Japanese decks and just bounce off like bb guns.

However, the American destroyer and air attacks caused much consternation with Kurita, who was not exactly the most formidable Japanese naval officer. He, by the way, had had an awful time of it. He had been aboard the Otago, which had

Johnson: been sunk by torpedoes from the American submarine Darter in the East China Sea a couple of days before. He had been blown into the water by the torpedo hitting the Otago and had been picked up out of the water by some of his crew and brought back into the Musashi, and then the Musashi was sunk from under him. So he was battle fatigued, if you might use that word.

When he saw these airplanes attacking him and destroying him, he thought the American destroyers were cruisers, and he thought the American Jeep Carriers were Halsey's Fleet battle carriers, so he got scared and ran.

Erickson: Umm.

Johnson: And he ran right back to the San Bernardino Straights.

(chuckle)

Anyway, that was the defeat of Admiral Kurita by a bunch of very brave American aviators aboard those Jeep Carriers in Taffy I, II and III. And Samuel Elliott Morrison in his book on the history of the U. S. Navy in World War II gives them a wonderful tribute. I have it somewhere—his actual tribute to them for their bravery in attacking against such terrible odds.

Erickson: When did you get to come home?

Johnson: Pardon?

Erickson: When did you get to come home?

Johnson: Let's see. We went through the Battle of Leyte, we did the landing on Mindoro in February of '44, the landing of Lingayen Gulf and Luzon in January of '44, the landings on Panay and Negros in April of '44. Then we moved down to Morotai south of the Philippines and did two landings in Borneo, one at Tarakan and one at Brunei Bay.

Johnson: Let's see, I think it was April or May of '45, and after that we went up to Iwo Gima. After that terrible invasion *in which we did not participate*, we were also in Okinawa. We were not on that invasion either but were up *on a resupply mission*. We then went back to Iwo and loaded up with jeeps and a lot of equipment, trucks and jeeps *to return to the states*. *While in the North Pacific we made two trips to Japan, the first to Kuri and the second to Nagoya. We transported Army occupation personnel to those two Japanese cities.*

Of course the war was now over. This would have been in the fall of '45. *From Iwo Jima with a load of jeeps we headed home stopping briefly at Pearl Harbor and then continueing on to San Francisco under the Golden Gate Bridge and into Oakland where we docked and unloaded our cargo.*

I had to remain on duty in the Navy for some time. The government had a point system of how you got out of the service after the war was over. The points depended on your age, how long you had been overseas, if you were married, if you had children, etc. ... My points were such that I was able to get out of active duty the end of May, 1945.

Carol was in Walla Walla, and she came down and spent some time living in a boarding house in San Francisco while I was on my ship off Treasure Island. When I was released, we flew up to Eugene, Oregon, for two days. I got a three day pass from the captain at Treasure Island in exchange for five pounds of butter. We went up to Eugene and got married and had a three day honeymoon in Carmel. California.

After our marriage, we lived in naval housing in Oakland very near where the Oakland arena is now, not far from the Oakland airport.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: I don't think the housing is there anymore. After that we went up to Seattle, and I was separated from the Navy. We went up

Johnson: for a weekend at Victoria, B.C. and then we went back down to Oregon, and that's when I spent a year at the University of Oregon as a graduate student in philosophy before we went east to Yale in '47.

I was at Yale from 1947 to 1950, and then I went from Yale to Oxford in '50 to '51. I returned to Yale in '51 and got my Master's Degree in 1950 and my Ph.D. in 1951, both from Yale.

I taught at Yale for one year, '51 to '52, then went from Yale to San Francisco and spent a year at the Institute for Philosophical Research under Mortimer Adler and left there after one year because I was lucky enough to get a decent job.

There were very, very few jobs available. There was one at UC Riverside, which was going to be opening in February of '54: one at San Jose State, which I interviewed for, and one in New York State, SUNY system at Binghamton. I've never been there. But I interviewed at San Jose, and I could have gotten a job there, which would have been very nice.

I never went back to New York for the interview at Binghamton because the people at the new campus in Riverside thought because of my background experience in great ideas and great books with Mortimer Adler, I would know a little bit about Western Civ.

They were going to have a core course in the History of Western Civilization at the new school at Riverside. It would be a mandatory two year course for all students.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: It was the best course this campus ever offered. The students learned more from that Western Civ course than from any other course they took—bar none, even their majors. And I have had students from those earlier years come back and say, “We learned more in Western Civ than we ever learned in any other course we ever took.”

Johnson: It was two years mandatory—and then the scientists complained. They didn't have time to get their majors done, so they decreased the Western Civ to one year.

The scientists kept complaining and finally they made a one year Western Civ requirement for social science and humanities majors but not for the scientists.

It is out of that course in Western Civ that our book, (Jack Beatty's and my book), Heritage of Western Civilization, came to realization. We built the book out of the course. Jack and I co-edited the first four editions of Heritage, and then after his death in 1975, I have edited the last four editions. I am planning the ninth edition of Heritage of Western Civilization with Prentice Hall as well as a second edition of a book called Sources of World Civilization, which is a derivative from the Heritage book also published by Prentice Hall..

Erickson: Um hmm. Well, who was your contact for UCR?

Johnson: Contact?

Erickson: I mean who contacted you? How did you know about the job being available?

Johnson: You know I can't really ... I can't (pause)

Erickson: Would it have been Arthur Turner?

Johnson: No, I think (pause) Edward Strong, the philosopher, at Berkeley. I went over to Berkeley to talk to them about a job on their faculty which I probably could have got. But Strong said, "You know, we are going to have a brand new campus at Riverside, and the head of the Division of Humanities is a man by the name of Jack Olmsted. You might want to get in touch with him."

So I wrote a letter to Olmsted, and he said, "Robert Nisbet and I are going to be in Berkeley recruiting people. Why don't you

Johnson: meet me at the hotel?" What's the name of the hotel that's just campus? (pause)

Erickson: (nodding negatively)

Johnson: It's not a very well-known hotel anyway. So I met Olmsted and Nisbet and took them over and introduced them to Carol who was waiting for me in the car with our little daughter Julie. I think that's what got me the job. Olmsted looked at Carol and Julie and must have thought that I would be a good faculty member. A beautiful wife and little baby daughter.

They hired me and I came down here September, 1953, and since the campus buildings were not built, they housed the four of us faculty members who were hired early in the insect museum in the Entomology building up on the hill.

That insect collection, which I am told was the finest insect collection in the world, was the work of Dr. Timberlake. Dr. Timberlake was an elderly gentleman. He was an uncle of Richard Nixon.

Erickson: Oh, uh huh.

Johnson: And we used to sit there and make dirty cracks about Richard Nixon. We didn't realize until later that Timberlake, who was in the room next to us, probably overheard all the things we said.

(laughter)

Johnson: We had this story ... you want anecdotes ... about Timberlake. He was there in the morning when we came, there in the evening when we left, and never left the room at noon. So we decided that he must have eaten insects for lunch.

(laughter)

Johnson: Oh, we had a pretty good time.

Erickson: There were four of you up there.

Johnson: Yes, I'll tell you who they were.

Erickson: Ok.

Johnson: Paul Straubinger. He wouldn't make any fun of Nixon because Paul Straubinger ... he's dead now. He was German and he wouldn't want to say anything negative about anyone in authority.

Gene Purpus was in English. He was a suave man with a cigarette holder and a yellow Cadillac who left UCR and married an heiress and retired to Belvedere Island in San Francisco Bay.

Jack Beatty of History, who was badly wounded in World War II. He was a hero. He had the Silver Star. What he did was ... He was up on the front lines with a buddy. His buddy was shot in the chest, and he had to be taken to first aid immediately, so Jack picked up the wounded man and carried him on his back all the way back for medical attention. And Jack himself was shot right in the middle, and he always walked ... Did you ever know Jack Beatty?

Erickson: No, I never did.

Johnson: He always walked stooped over like this. It wasn't natural, it was because of the war wound in his chest.

Erickson: Oh.

Johnson: Anyway, he got his buddy back to the aid station and saved the man's life and was awarded the Silver Star. So that was Jack Beatty who died in '75, partly because of his war wound.

Another charter faculty member was Jean Boggs who was in Art and later went to Washington, DC to the National Gallery and then to Toronto to the Canadian National Gallery. She was a Degas scholar, and I assume she's retired. I don't know whether she's living or dead.

Johnson: Then there was Bill Sharp who was in Art History and was also an actor. He had the most beautiful British accent you ever heard. It was perfect. He left and went to Tufts University in Boston, and I don't know what's happened to him. So that was the group of us.

And then there were some early founding members of the faculty in the sciences—Bob Wild in Physics and George Helmkamp in Chemistry, Adelaide Brokaw in Biology, Jack Hewitt and Christena Lindborg, Frank Lindeburg ... what was his first name in physical education?

Erickson: Franklin.

Johnson: Franklin Lindeburg. All of these were founding members of the faculty. Then in February of the next year, there were a number of new people, a whole bunch of them who were charter members—people like Philip Wheelwright and later Dave Harrah in Philosophy, Hank Carney, Charlie Woodhouse ... all those people in the picture in the annual. A whole bunch of them in the Social Sciences and also in the other fields were charter faculty members.

Erickson: In your area, Philosophy, you were the first one here.

Johnson: I founded the department.

Erickson: So you were able to establish the curriculum?

Johnson: Oh yeh. 'Course it was a fairly standard curriculum in philosophy. There are basic courses that any department will have.

Erickson: And how did you go about recruiting other faculty?

Johnson: All that work was done by Jack Olmsted, and of course the divisional organization ... we did not have departments at that time. Jack would do the formal hiring, but he would consult with me. People would apply for jobs and I would look over

Johnson: their dossiers and where they were getting their degrees and what their fields were. I would say, "Jack, this is a person we could use. He fills a need we have like Philip Wheelwright, who handled the ancient philosophy. David Harrah handled the logic and philosophy of science. Later on Bernie Magnus handled Heidegger and Nietzsche and Existentialism and Sartre courses and so on. So that's the way we did it, Olmsted and I together.

Erickson: Well, how about that early planning? You were here a few months before the students actually arrived, so ...

Johnson: Yeh, one semester.

Erickson: One semester. Did you meet with other people in other areas to establish that Western Civ course?

Johnson: It was mostly done by the four of us in the humanities. We did consult with people in the social sciences, in particular and occasionally with people in the life and natural sciences.

Erickson: Um hmm. Can you remember, by chance, what was the first event on campus when the students did arrive?

Johnson: There was a formal reception with Gordon Watkins.

Erickson: And where was that held?

Johnson: Over in the Dance Hall in the Physical Education building, the old Physical Education building. There was a dance hall.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: Yes, that's where it was.

Erickson: Were their orientations, too, in the beginning?

Johnson: I can't tell you that, I can't remember.

Erickson: That's ok. Did every student ... there were about 126 students ... Did every student then, you said, have to take your philosophy class?

Johnson: No.

Erickson: Oh, the Western Civ course, but they didn't have to take philosophy?

Johnson: No, that was an option.

Erickson: How did you encourage students to take your class?

Johnson: I didn't really encourage anyone to take philosophy. Philosophy is a kind of calling that one has to want to take. You don't push people into philosophy. It's all right to encourage people to take an introduction into philosophy because it's good for them, but it's better not to push them. Philosophy is the kind of subject where the student has to feel that this is for him.

I was a Sociology major as an undergraduate at Linfield College, and every time a question would get very difficult, I would press my sociology professor on it, and he would say that is outside of his realm. You'll have to go across the hall and talk to the philosophy professor. So I said, "Ok, I'll go across the hall." So I became a philosophy major.

(chuckle)

That was the thing I loved: philosophy. You have to have a certain kind of warped mind and have a real yen for the ultimate questions to go into philosophy, and that's why we'd never push students.

The occasional student saw that this kind of ultimate intellectual question was for him—you know, the deepest questions: What is the meaning of life? Where did life come from, not biologically? The ultimate question: Why is there anything at all? That's the kind of question philosophers ask,

Johnson: and it's the kind of question that you have to have a special kind of urge to delve into to study philosophy. We never pushed students for that. We welcomed those who felt that this was what they wanted.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: Just as I knew that this was what I wanted, and I've never regretted it. I could have been a history teacher. I know a very great deal about history. I love history. I could have been a perfectly successful history professor.

I talk to historians, and I simply know more about history than they do. They know more about a very limited time period or a person or a set of very limited events. But when it comes to history as a whole, I'll ask them questions they can't give me the answers to. But I can give them, because I have a very general knowledge of history as well as philosophy. As I said, I could very well have been a history professor, no problem at all.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: I could have written ... in fact, I wrote a doctoral dissertation. This is anecdotal and you might find it amusing.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: The Secretary of Yale University was a man by the name of William Holden, III. He came from a distinguished New England family, the Holdens. And as Secretary of Yale University, he felt he had to have a Ph.D. degree, but he didn't have one. He had been as a young man in China at a place called Yale in China in a town called Changsha, which is in central China.

Back around the turn of the century, there was a movement both in Yale and the other Ivy League schools, called "robust" Christianity. Yale undergraduates would go to China and try to

Johnson: convert the Chinese to Christianity. They'd set up colleges in China. Yale set up this college, Yale in China, in Changsha.

Holden had been out there and taught at Yale in China. So for his doctoral dissertation, he was writing a history of Yale in China. The trouble is that he was so busy as the Secretary of Yale University, he couldn't write his dissertation.

So he sent me down in the archives in the basement of Sterling Library there in New Haven where all the archival documents for Yale in China were stored. I went through those documents and I wrote his history of Yale in China for him.

It was hot, oh gosh, it was hot down there—no air conditioning in those days.

Erickson: Was it?

Johnson: Terribly hot. So I wrote that doctoral dissertation for Holden for \$1.00 an hour.

Erickson: Oh, my goodness.

Johnson: I gave it to him and that was the last I thought of it until I went back to Yale some time later. I went into the Reserve book room where they keep copies of all doctoral dissertations and any of the books that are published based on the doctoral dissertations. Well, there it was—Holden's doctoral dissertation.

Erickson: But your name was not on it at all?

Johnson: Just in the preface, he mentions thanking me for some help.

END OF SIDE ONE

Johnson: Holden's dissertation was later published as a book. I had written whole book. So you could say I have written books in philosophy and also books in history. I should have a Ph.D. in history.

(laughter)

Johnson: But I don't. My Ph.D. in philosophy is enough.

Erickson: I don't want to forget to ask about your children. You mentioned Julie.

Johnson: Yes, she lives in Oceanside. She has two daughters, so I have two granddaughters who live in Oceanside. Erica is just graduated from Vista High School and has enrolled at UC Santa Cruz. She'll go to Santa Cruz in September. Tracy is 13. In fact, it's her birthday today. Then my son Stuart lives in Louisiana. He has a very nice position. He's in charge of the Louisiana State Parks system.

Erickson: Hmm.

Johnson: Quite a big job. His daughter Lauren is 13 and she's an athlete. She's a softball and volleyball player. Very athletic. They live in Breux Bridge, which is a suburb of Lafayette, and he commutes into Baton Rouge where he manages the state park system from an office in the state capitol complex, although he spends a good deal of time out in the parks. We have visited some of the parks with him. Very nice.

Our third child, Elizabeth, or Lisa, lives in Philadelphia. Her husband, David Eckman, is a professor of anesthesiology at the University of Pennsylvania and is a practicing doctor as well, practicing out of the University of Pennsylvania Medical

Johnson: School. They have three little boys, Joshua, Yonaton or Yoni, and Uri or Uriah.

Uriah is named after one of Carol's ancestors, Uriah Mattson. The Mattsons came to Maryland from England and then they moved to Derry, Pennsylvania (east of Pittsburgh in the 18th century), and we visited and found the graves of Uriah Mattson and his wife in a country churchyard just outside of Derry.

Our youngest child, Melinda (Mindy) lives near San Jose. She has two children, Sonja and Colin. Her husband, Bill Wright, is a microbiologist doing research at Stanford Research Institute in Palo Alto.

Erickson: I was going to ask about your children then. Where did they go to school?

Johnson: Oh, our kids.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: The older two went to the school ... what's the name of the school there on Arlington Avenue? (*Victoria School*) and later transferred to *Hyatt* when we moved to the area near UCR.

Erickson: Jefferson?

Johnson: No, Arlington Avenue just west ... right by the School for the Deaf.

Erickson: Uh. On Arlington. There's one just off Arlington. It's Washington.

Johnson: No. If you go east on Arlington, before you get to ... what's the name ...

Erickson: I'm sorry. I'm drawing a blank.

Johnson: Magnolia is in Magnolia Center. You go down Arlington past the Catholic Church, past the swimming pool ... under the

Johnson: freeway and past the school for the deaf on your right and ... what's the name?

Erickson: Well, there's the Gage Middle School there, near the School for the Deaf. I don't ...

Johnson: There's a grade school there.

Erickson: I'm sorry, I don't know.

Johnson: Anyway, that's where they went. Let's see. They didn't go to Poly. They went to ...

Erickson: I just remembered. I can picture the site of the school, but I can't come up with the name.

Johnson: Yeh. Well, anyway, later they went to the middle school on University Avenue down here. What's the name?

Erickson: Isn't that Uni?

Johnson: Yeh. They went to Uni. And then they went to North High. They all went to North High.

Erickson: So were you pleased with all the schools in the system?

Johnson: Oh yeh. They liked North High. Elizabeth's husband, David, went to Poly and they were always bickering about whether Poly is better than North.

Erickson: The rivalry, sure.

Johnson: Rivalry, right.

Erickson: What did the city of Riverside look like in those early days?

Johnson: Small.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: Wasn't a town, and it now is. It petered out ... oh ... Magnolia Avenue where the parent orange tree is. You know where that is?

Erickson: Um hmm. I do.

Johnson: There wasn't much beyond there.

Erickson: Oh.

Johnson: Yeh. You went through open country till you got to Arlington. And then there was Arlington Center out there all by itself. Out California Avenue and out toward Rohr about where Sears is. You know where that is?

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: Nothing out there.

Erickson: Were there orange groves?

Johnson: Orange groves, yes.

Erickson: Well, back on campus, there was the existing Citrus Experiment Station and they were building all the new buildings.

Johnson: Yes. They were building five new buildings.

Erickson: What was it like, that transition? Did you interact with the Citrus Experiment Station staff?

Johnson: To some extent, because we were in their Entomology building. We got to know some of them. We used to make fun of Irv Hall. Irv Hall ... we would have coffee with him every morning.

Erickson: Was he a scientist?

Johnson: Yes, he was up at the Citrus Experiment Station. He was a scientist. Irv Hall, no he had nothing to do with citrus trees.

Johnson: Well, Irv Hall was a nice guy, but he took everything you said literally. We were constantly pulling poor Irv's leg.

Erickson: You were teasing him.

Johnson: We were teasing him. He never knew when we were joking or when we were serious. Nice guy. He went up to Bishop. I don't know what ... he had some association with the

Johnson: University of California ... they have something up there out of Bishop, up in the mountains.

And another person went up there. Ted Pengelley went up there. The oldest living things are up there, the pine trees, way up high on the mountains east of Bishop. They are thousands of years old. They are older than redwoods. They are very small trees and they cling to the rocks up there at high elevations. They are the oldest things living. There's a special chipmunk up there, and this is what Ted Pengelley was studying at Bishop—to study these chipmunks. Don't ask me why.

(chuckle)

Erickson: Was one of the reasons that you liked Riverside because of the liberal arts concept?

Johnson: Well, the reason that I liked to come to Riverside was that it was a job. There were hardly any jobs in those days.

Erickson: Did you like the idea of a small school or did you prefer a large school?

Johnson: I preferred a large school where they had Ph.D. students where I could do research. I was basically a research person, although I was a very successful teacher. As you probably know, I was Faculty Research Lecturer. Did she (Carol) give you a copy of my faculty research lecture?

Erickson: Yes, she did.

Johnson: It's somewhere around here.

Erickson: Actually it's right over there on the table.

Johnson: Well, I was Faculty Research Lecturer in 1982, and as you know, that's the highest honor any faculty member can be given.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: But I was also, if I may say so myself, a very good lecturer. I inaugurated a tradition at Riverside.

Erickson: Oh, tell me what that was.

Johnson: When I would lecture in the humanities class, the Western Civ, the students when I got done would clap. And so that started a tradition after. After every guest lecturer came in, they would clap.

(laughter)

Johnson: So that's my tradition.

Erickson: Very nice then.

Johnson: I was a good lecturer.

Erickson: Sure.

Johnson: Oh, yeh.

Erickson: Were you pleased then when UCR became a general campus?

Johnson: Oh, absolutely. I was a research person basically. I thought a University of California should be a research institution. I was not in agreement with Gordon Watkins about the small liberal arts college.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: I mean there's nothing wrong with a small liberal arts college. Swarthmore and Oberlin are fine schools. But the University of California is basically a research institution. It is the finest research university in the world, and the University of California at Riverside is part of it. We can share in that fact, and that's something to be proud of.

Johnson: For me, the two centers of my life have always been my home, my family and the University of California—until my retirement.

Erickson: That's wonderful. You were also the Chair of the Academic Senate for a time.

Johnson: Yes, I was Chair of the local Academic Senate. I was Chair of the University of California Academic Senate. I was Chair of the University Academic Senate for two years and I was a member of the Board of Regents for the university.

Erickson: When was that? What time period?

Johnson: From '81 to '83, I believe. I think those dates are correct. So I sat on the board. I got acquainted with people like Governor Jerry Brown and at an earlier time ... I've forgotten ... what governor we had? There was Knowland and ... who was that other guy? Well, Nixon. I never met Nixon. There was a man named Campbell on that board, and I'll never forget. Glen Campbell.

Erickson: Oh. He was on there for a long time.

Johnson: Oh, forever. They tried to get rid of him, but they couldn't get rid of him. Glen Campbell was head of the Hoover Institute at Stanford. He was as far right as you can get, and I'll never forget going to a Regents meeting and standing in line with him for lunch. He tried to convert me to the Republican party.

Erickson: Just over lunch, huh?

Johnson: Yeh, over lunch. And I didn't want to disabuse him, but I had to tell him I was a Democrat and there wasn't much chance that I'd become a Republican.

Erickson: Can you remember some of the issues that the University was dealing with at that time?

Johnson: Well, some time during then were all the student riots. I can remember when Reagan was Governor and going to a Regents meeting in Berkeley and the building was surrounded by the National Guard.

I can remember another Regents meeting at Santa Cruz where students got up on the roof of the building we were in, and I can remember a meeting in Los Angeles where they were surrounding the building, and we had to be escorted out by armed guards.

I can remember Reagan standing out in front of the building after the meeting was over, and I was just down the walk from him. He was surrounded by nine bodyguards. I counted them.

Erickson: Oh really?

Johnson: I counted nine bodyguards. I remember another meeting in San Diego where I had to go to the "john" and Reagan had to go at the same time. He went in there and I had to stand a stall away from him because he had one guard in each stall on each side.

Erickson: Goodness.

Johnson: It was rough times, terrible. I didn't approve of it but ...

Erickson: Did you ever meet with the students and talk with them?

Johnson: Oh yeh. I talked with the students. They had a good point. They had a guy who was leading them by the name of Mario Savio.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: He was a rebel rouser. He was a very smart guy. He was a philosophy major at Berkeley—very, very smart, and he caused a lot of trouble. But in a good cause. I mean there had to be changes. Things were not as they should be.

Erickson: Let's talk about the time that you were the Chair of the Senate here at Riverside. What is your feeling about Shared Governance?

Johnson: I'm all for it. I think the University of California, the faculty ... After all, the faculty of the University of California is the University of California.

Think about it a minute. The students come and they go after four years. The buildings are more permanent, but after all the buildings are not forever. These buildings come and they go eventually. The administration doesn't last. The Board of Regents doesn't last.

The only enduring thing in a university is the faculty, which means in essence that the faculty is the university. If you are talking about a university, any university, you are talking about its faculty. The university is just as good as and no better than its faculty. You rank universities by the quality of their faculty.

That's why I said a few minutes ago that the University of California is the best university in the world. Why? Because it has the best faculty in the world. And the University of California, Riverside does not have to bow to any of the other campuses. They may not have the Nobel Prizes in the way that Berkeley and UCLA and San Diego and Irvine do, but overall, in my estimation, any one of the faculty members here at Riverside could move to Berkeley or Irvine or San Diego or Los Angeles and meet the quality standards of those campuses without any problem. Every bit as good. Their academic personnel committees would find them equally as good in publications, teaching and university and public service.

Johnson: And that's what we judged ... you were asking about academic personnel ... that's what we judged when we'd see ... The Committee on Academic Personnel ... you know how people got promoted, do you?

Erickson: Well, you tell me, please.

Johnson: Ok. When a person came up for promotion, he or she had to be reviewed after six years. What is (pause) The Association of University Professors, they've set up a standard for universities all over the country that you can't keep any faculty member on forever without tenure. After six years they have to be reviewed, and they have to be promoted or fired at a maximum of eight years.

Well, when a person in a department came up for promotion, the department would write a letter saying we recommend this person for promotion, and they would vote on it.

It may be unanimous with the department's tenured faculty only, tenure faculty would vote unanimously for promotion for this person, or a split vote or something.

They would send this recommendation to the Committee on Academic Personnel and the Committee on Academic Personnel would review the department's recommendation.

If the Committee agreed with the recommendation, it would recommend to the Chancellor the promotion. If it disagreed, it would send a recommendation to the Chancellor that it did not believe the person should be promoted. Now the departments would tend to want to promote everybody for a lot of reasons, *sometimes not good ones*.

Once in a while, they would recommend one of their assistant professors not be promoted, but that was very rare. It happened when I was chairing the Committee on Academic Personnel

Johnson: that a couple departments recommended people whose names I won't mention ...

Erickson: Ok.

Johnson: for promotion. We reviewed their files and said these people have no grounds for this recommendation.

Johnson: So we recommended to The Vice Chancellor, Marv Nachman, ... you know, on behalf of Chancellor Hinderaker, who did not participate unless there were crucial cases.

We went into Marv Nachman and said we recommend that these people not be promoted, and Marv looked at them. They were both women. I could see ... I showed the publication records of one of them and it was pathetic, and he could see it was pathetic, but he said, "I've got to promote 'em." (*because they were women and he was afraid to fire a woman*).

He promoted both of them, and some of the other members and I on the Committee on Academic Personnel resigned as a result.

Erickson: Oh.

Johnson: Well, we couldn't stay on. We'd recommended they not be promoted and he promoted them over our heads. You see, he had no confidence in us. We resigned.

Erickson: Well, the idea of shared governance then. Is the University of California the only one that has that system?

Johnson: More so than perhaps any other university. Other universities have it to some extent.

Erickson: They do.

Johnson: Faculty are consulted. Oh, surely they are for promotions and demotions and firings. But the deans and administrators take the primary responsibility, whereas in the University of California, the faculty are heavily involved in it. The

Johnson: administrators, they darned well better be careful if they defy the judgment of the faculty. If they do it very many times, they are not going to be administrators any longer.

Erickson: And what would that process be?

Johnson: Well, the Chair of the Academic Council would go to the President of the University and say, “The Chancellor of our campus is not following the recommendations of the Committee on Academic Personnel. In fact, he’s promoting people we think are not qualified for tenure. He’s ruining the reputation of the faculty of the university, and since the faculty is the University of California, he’s ruining the reputation of the University of California. Get rid of him.”

Erickson: But that’s never happened has it?

Johnson: I don’t know. (pause) Yes. I think maybe the President has tactfully ... Yes, he’s tactfully unloaded the Chancellor at Santa Cruz.

Erickson: Oh.

Johnson: What was his name? Peterson or something?

Erickson: I don’t know.

Johnson: This was before a good friend of mine took over as Chancellor on a temporary basis—the engineer from Berkeley?

Erickson: Karl Pister?

Johnson: Karl Pister, yes. I saw him just a couple weeks ago. We had an interesting ... anecdote. We took a cruise on a riverboat in Louisiana. We went from New Orleans on the riverboat up to Memphis, a week cruise. It was a lot of fun. Can you see a baritone singing “Old Man River?”

(chuckle)

Erickson: Sure.

Johnson: The Mississippi is a very big river. Very interesting. An enormous amount of barge traffic—you can't believe the barge traffic floating down the river. Logs, twigs, branches and a body or two maybe ...

Erickson: (chuckle)

Johnson: Anyway, we stopped at Natchez, and we stopped at Vicksburg and went onshore and toured the battlefield at the famous siege at Vicksburg. Anyway, on board the ship, just by chance, we were sitting having a drink, Carol and I, and who should be there but Karl Pister taking the same cruise.

Erickson: Oh my.

Johnson: So we had a good meeting and he talked about his five years as Chancellor at Santa Cruz where he was filling in before they could get a permanent—I guess that's before Dean McHenry went to be Chancellor and after they had to get rid of ... I think his name was Peterson. He simply couldn't ... his desk was piled with paperwork and everything was just a shambles. Nobody knew what in the dickens was going on at Santa Cruz.

So they had to tactfully ease him out and the Pister went over there until McHenry came and took over. McHenry was Chancellor there for many years and then he retired and became a ... he bought a vineyard in Bonnie Doon.

It's up the river in the Redwoods from Santa Cruz. I don't know if you know Bonnie Doon?

Erickson: No.

Johnson: Well, he bought a vineyard and became a wine maker. I don't know if he has his own brand or not. He produces wine from Bonnie Doon. That's a wine growing area and a lot of vineyards up there.

Johnson: I don't know whether Dean McHenry is still alive or not. The library at Santa Cruz, the main library, is called the McHenry Library. Just as the library here is called the Rivera Library.

Erickson: Um hmm. Am I correct that you established a systemwide award?

Johnson: Yes, I did.

Erickson: Would you care to talk about it?

Johnson: Oh sure. I thought that the administrators of the University of California were always giving each other pats on the back. Nobody was honoring the people who were active in the Academic Senate. I felt people who devote so much of their lives to the Academic Senate ought to be honored for it.

I set up the "Oliver Johnson Award for Distinguished Service to the Academic Senate." The first award was given this month ...

Erickson: Oh, is that right?

Johnson: by the Academic Council, yeh. The recommendation was made by the Assembly and approved by the Council and instead of giving it to one person, they were very good. They gave it to two people. I talked to one of them about it a couple weeks ago—Carl Bovell from UCR.

Erickson: Oh, how nice.

Johnson: Carl Bovell was given that award, and a man in history at Santa Barbara shared it with him. I've forgotten his name now. He teaches history at Santa Barbara. I know him, I've met him. But they are sharing the award this year, the first year it's given in 1998.

It will be given every two years. Presumably the normal thing would be to give it to one person, but they thought that these two people, both had done so much for the Academic Senate

Johnson: they'd have to share the award. I was happy for that. I congratulated Carl the other day.

Erickson: I'd like you to tell the story if you would, please, about the time you and Carol were at an auction or an antique store.

Johnson: Oh, I wanted to talk to Carol about that—something to do with the portraits of Gordon Watkins and his wife.

Erickson: Watkins. Didn't you two find them?

Johnson: I think so. As I remember, we were looking for a frame for something to hang on our wall. We went into a shop to buy a frame, and here were these two portraits of Gordon Watkins and his wife. How they got there I can't remember. So we looked at them and wondered where in the world they came from. Well, this man had gone around and bought up frames, and of course ...

Erickson: Oh, that's why he bought them. I see.

Johnson: He bought the pictures with them. What he was going to do was remove the pictures to sell the frame. And we said, "Oh, no. Those are important people. So we'll buy the frames from you." We bought the frames with the pictures in them and shipped them back here. Are they in the administration building, I don't know?

Erickson: They're safe. I don't know exactly where.

Johnson: I don't know where they are, but we rescued those from oblivion.

Erickson: Yes.

Johnson: They would have been gone. But how he got them, and why anyone would have given them to him or sold them to him ... All he wanted were the frames. He didn't know who these two people were.

Erickson: Well, that was really lucky, wasn't it?

Johnson: Yes, it sure was.

Erickson: Well, the deans you've worked with, or the chancellors or the vice chancellors. Are there some in particular who were very supportive of your area that you'd like to single out?

Johnson: Jack Olmsted always was, very much so. A very fine ... they were not deans at that time. He was divisional chairman, Chairman of the Division of the Humanities.

You see, we did not have the same structure the campus has now. They had just the four divisions: the humanities, social sciences, life sciences, and natural sciences. They had no deans, they were divisional chairs. And there were no departments. There was no Department of Philosophy. That was set up later.

Erickson: What was that area called?

Johnson: Philosophy. No department, just philosophy. There were certain philosophy faculty in the Division of Humanities which was chaired by Jack Olmsted.

Erickson: I see.

Johnson: It was only later that departments were set up when we became larger and it became necessary really to have departments. Organization became too unwieldy, we didn't have that much in common with art historians or whatever. We had our own problems in philosophy, and they had their problems.

We needed a departmental organization, so along about 1959 or so ... about the time we became a general campus, we also broke down the division into departments. The division still remained, but we also had departments.

Erickson: How do you feel about the campus today with its growth?

Johnson: Oh, I think that's wonderful. I laud it.

Erickson: How would you envision the campus in ten or twenty years?

Johnson: Better. UCR doesn't have to bow down to any of the other campuses. It's as good as they come.

Erickson: And what do you think would be an ideal size?

Johnson: Oh, not too big. I don't think 35,000 would be very good, like UCLA. It's just too big.

Erickson: Too big.

Johnson: Between 15 and 20 thousand would be fine. I don't know how many students there are now.

Erickson: Around 10.

Johnson: 10. That's a good size, but it wouldn't hurt it to grow.

Erickson: When did you decide to retire, Oliver?

Johnson: When I reached 66.

Erickson: It was mandatory then?

Johnson: Yeh. I believe ... no, I don't think I had to retire. Yes, I did. They changed it later. Well, there was an exception to mandatory retirement for faculty nationwide, and then they dropped that and it became mandatory. But I think I retired before then. Oh, I had been thirty eight years. I was 66.

Erickson: Um hmm. Long enough.

Johnson: Let somebody else take over.

Erickson: Well, you're still very busy. You mentioned that you are editing.

Johnson: Oh, I'm editing. I've got the one book, which is going to be published in the year 2000. A second book which is going to be published in 2001. A third book which was published this spring and a fourth book which I am not editing—I am writing.

It's a fascinating topic which will be published in the next two months. That's a very interesting book. It's mainly history. I call it The Eternal "Now." It's an account of the Big Bang Theory of the origin of the universe and the whole issue of the eternal return, whether we live in a universe of linear history or a universe of cyclic history. Do you know what that means?

Erickson: No, would you tell me?

Johnson: Well, linear history simply means the universe we live in has been existing eternally and will continue to exist eternally. One thing coming after another, future, present, past in a linear line—in a line so that the future will be different from the present and the past. The past exists only in records and in memory. The future does not exist because it has not yet arrived.

You might say in a sense that it exists in anticipation. I can anticipate lunch, but lunch does not exist because lunch ... it's just twelve o'clock.

Cyclic history is the idea that the whole universe is in a cycle so that what's happening right now has happened an infinite number of times in the past and will happen an infinite number of times in the future. So don't get bored!

(chuckle)

Because the history goes like this, round and round and round, what's happening now has happened eternally before and will happen eternally again. This is known as eternal recurrence or eternal return. There is some reason to think that either one of the theories is a correct account—either one or the other or possible some third, which no one has yet thought of.

Johnson: The scientists have given a great deal of thought and done a lot of writing on the subject. Unless there's some possible third alternative, these are the only two accounts of the history of the universe. Either it's linear and goes on a line from past to present to future or it's cyclic and it repeats itself.

Erickson: Um hmm.

Johnson: And there's no answer to the question. There may never be an answer to the question of which it is. Now they have evidence ... they have evidence of the Big Bang, as almost surely the universe as we know it commenced with a Big Bang, and there are two different kinds of evidence.

One is the evidence found by Edwin Hubble. Edwin Hubble is a very famous astrophysicist and probably the most important astrophysicist since Copernicus. Using some evidence of an astronomer at Arizona State University at Flagstaff, Hubble came to the conclusion based on some evidence of his own at Mt. Wilson and Mt. Palomar (in Southern California) that the galaxies that make up the universe were expanding. That is to say they were rushing away from each other.

And from this he inferred that they were rushing away from each other because of the gigantic explosion of the Big Bang. At the Big Bang, they were very close together, and when the Big Bang came, at the explosion, they began to rush away from each other, the galaxies, at this enormous rate of speed.

Hubble's Law says that the rate at which the galaxies are rushing away from each other is proportionate to the distance between them.

Now the interesting thing from an astrophysical point of view about this is that there are two forces at work. The expansive force caused by the Big Bang, which is causing the galaxies to rush away from each other and the force of gravitation, which would draw them together. That raises the question, which

Johnson: wins? The expanding force or the contracting force, the explosive force of the Big Bang or the contracting force of gravitation? Well, the answer, according to the cyclic theory, is they both win.

Sooner or later, according to Hubble, the expansion will stop and gravitation will start bringing the galaxies together again until they come together into this tight ball and the density and the heat created to this point will cause them to explode again. And then gravitation will bring them back together again and explode again, and this is the eternal return, the cyclic history of the universe.

Well, nobody know whether that's correct or whether the linear account where there is no such thing as a Big Bang is true. The universe simply moves from past through to future.

There's evidence for the Big Bang, however. A couple of astrophysicists working for the Bell Laboratories in Homedale, New Jersey in the '50s, Penzias and Wilson had a giant telescope and were trying to pick up some high range radiation from radioactivity in the atmosphere. They started picking up this radiation. It came as a kind of buzz into their radio telescope, but it came from every direction. They said if it comes from every direction, there can't be a local source. It's not coming from anywhere, it's everywhere. What was it? They measured it and it had some heat. Now there's a thing called a Kelvin Number. It is a slight amount of heat that the universe should have, after a man named Lord Kelvin, a 19th century English physicist.

Penzias and Wilson measured the heat they were picking up from all directions in their radio telescope, and it was significantly higher than the Kelvin Number. That meant something had created this heat, and they finally came to the conclusion that it was the residual heat from the Big Bang. About twelve billion years later, like embers from a dying fire, some residual heat from a tremendous explosion still remained.

Erickson: My.

Johnson: So they had empirical evidence, evidence they could point to that there had been a Big Bang. So that evidence that there had been a Big Bang, along with Hubble's evidence of the expansion of the universe, and the fact that the galaxies were rushing away from each other, together confirmed the existence of the Big Bang.

The Big Bang theory is accepted pretty well among scientists today. In fact, our universe began about 12 billion years ago.

There's a physicist at Cal Tech—a woman by the name of Friedman who has made the estimation that she thinks it's about twelve to fifteen billion years ago. So our universe—whether it's the only universe or if it's one of a series of repetitive universes we can't say, but it's about that old.

Erickson: Well, thank you very much for this interview. It was very interesting.

Johnson: I hope so.

Erickson: Absolutely.

Johnson: You didn't learn too much about the beginnings of the UCR. I hope you learned something.

Erickson: Absolutely we did. It's very valuable. Thank you.

Johnson: You're welcome. Anything else?

Erickson: No. Would you like to talk about anything else?

Johnson: I'd like to talk about myself, but that would be a guilt trip. I guess I won't.

(laughter)

Erickson: Well, thank you.

Johnson: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Text in *italics* indicates editing by Professor Johnson.