

Hallett Gutierrez: All right. So, I'm Anna Hallett (Gutierrez) class of '21. Today is Thursday, June 11th, 2020. I'm here virtually with Nick Lyons and also with us is Helene Tieger, college archivist, class of '85. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we're meeting today through Zoom. And this is for BardCorps. So, Nick, would you be able to tell a little bit about how you came to Bard?

Lyons: Of course. It was, it was very chancy. I had just gotten out of the Army in January 1956 and I had a degree from the Wharton School of all places in insurance; something that I had barely passed muster on at the college, but I had played basketball there, on the team, and that had kept me there. But at any rate, I got out of the Army, and felt dumb as a slug, knew nothing about literature whatsoever, but had an inkling from books I began to read when I was in France, that I should go back to school, even though I was at that time twenty-four or twenty-five and I had already gotten a degree as I told you in economics. I took four courses at The New School in New York and lived in a tiny room in Greenwich Village by myself and took four courses; one on how to write a short story, another on how to write poetry, and another on how to write plays, and all— those three were disasters. You cannot learn how to do those things by classes. The third class, which I knew nothing about when I signed up for it was called, 'English Prose Style,' and I thought, "Oh boy, they'll teach me how— what— how to write well." And I got into the class and there was a teacher named Keith Botsford who died only this year, but who was— had been a teacher at Bard up until that year, and he was a— one of those remarkable human beings with a great facility. He called himself a dandy, and he was a bit of a fraud I think, but he was a marvelous talker. I remember him sitting at the desk, cross-legged, on top of the desk with a bottle of Pepsi-Cola and talking about these wondrous writers starting in the 15th century whom I had never heard of; Thomas Nash, John Lyly, a number of the— the early works of Sir Thomas Browne a few years later, and I listened. And he would assign a thousand pages a week, and I would read every last one of them, and try to have some sort of understanding. And I understood very, very little of it. But I tried very hard. It was a night class with only about six or seven people in it, I think I was the only one who really paid any attention to this wonderful talker that he was. I remember on the last day of the class, I walked downstairs behind him. And we got to the bottom floor. I wanted to ask him, "Can I make the team? Do you think I have any skill at literature at all? Can I go on in this subject?" And he said to me very, very bluntly, he says, "Nick," he says, "You're not dumb," which I took to be a great compliment, but he says, "But you're absolutely illiterate!" And he said, "I know just what you should do, I've been teaching at a little college in upstate New York, and I want you to write to them right away, I have an appointment. It's now May or June but I think they'll have room for you, it's called Bard College." It's the first I had ever heard of Bard. And I called up and made an appointment to come up in a little black '46 Ford convertible that I had, with twin exhausts, that I'd bought for \$150 and I drove up to Bard and saw a man by the name of Buzz Gummere who was the, the admissions director at that time. I can tell you about the interview also, but that's how I got to Bard. I wanted to be not dumb, (laughs) I wanted to be not illiterate, I wanted to learn something, and I went as a freshman. I started from scratch.

Tieger: And did they suggest that you go as a freshman?

Lyons: Nobody suggested it, I just thought, “my goodness, I know nothing about English literature, I really have not read very much, I— most of the names— I’ve never heard of Yeats, I’ve never heard of Hawthorne, dozens and dozens of people who to me are the bulwark of knowledge whatsoever.” But he sent me to Buzz Gummere, it was a nice warm June day, and Buzz started asking me questions. One was— he started by asking me who I had read recently and I was fairly quiet on the subject so he began to propose names. And he said, “well have you read any Hawthorne?” And I said, “no, I haven’t, but I will, I’ll read him very soon, if he’s important, I’ll read him,” I said. And he went through three or four people like that and then almost in exhaustion, desperation, he said, “well Nick, who have you read?” And I said, “well, I’ve read all of Kafka,” someone had given me some— Am I on? I’m not on? The box isn’t over me there

Hallett Gutierrez: Yep, I think you’re still good

Tieger: You’re still good. I just had to close my window, there was a lot of outside noise, sorry.

Lyons: Good. I said, “someone had given me some Kafka and I had found the stories, particularly *The Metamorphosis*” in which a man is transferred into a cockroach, which I was very afraid I had been (laughs) so transferred, metamorphosed. But I had read almost all of Kafka, the two novels, all of the stories, most of the diaries. And he said, “well that’s very interesting, anything else?” And I said, “all of Jane Austen” which I had read for Keith Botsford’s class— he had assigned one novel, and I had read six or seven of them, and I couldn’t remember the names of them though. But he asked me one or two other questions, I said “Dostoevsky” and I said, “the French author Dostoevsky” and he said quietly “Russian,” (laughs) to remind me. And then he said, “well, that’s what I wanted to hear, I think we’ll have a place for you” and then he— since Bard was out of money as usual in those days, I think there were about 200 students possibly, and I know that President Chase [Case] would call up regularly to the parents asking for money, I think they were desperate. He said, “well you do have the GI Bill, don’t you?” and I said I did, and he said, “well, yes, I’m sure we have a place for you,” after that. So I was all set to go to Bard in the fall, very excited, beautiful school. He was the only person I’d met. He did mention that Keith Botsford had run into some problems, some infraction with a younger student and had been let go. And then I took off to work as a waiter in the Catskills, dropped a tray full of glasses on someone, drove across country and came back ready to go in September of 1956 as a freshman, in my same black Ford convertible with the twin exhausts.

Tieger: Nice.

Lyons: That’s how I got there.

Tieger: Nice, yeah.

Hallett Gutierrez: Wonderful. So in the Spring 1999 issue of the Bardian, you were quoted as saying that “Bard was the great hinge of my whole life” and in your memoir you talk about how

your year at Bard was “an essential year, one that changed me more than any other” and that it was “one that began to chart a course.” Could you talk more about that, and what made that year so impactful for you?

Lyons: I could talk endlessly about that Anna. It’s absolutely so. It was one year only, because for reasons I’ll tell you in a few minutes, but it was not that I excelled and suddenly got– began to get As in all of my courses. It was a great challenge when I first went up, I had never heard of most of the people everyone was talking about. And I don’t know how it is now, but when the college was smaller, everyone would gather at lunch and then gather at Adolph’s, the bar behind where I think the admissions office is now.

Tieger: Publications, right

Lyons: (laughs) There was one group of people that took care of the fire department, people who would polish the fire department, and then there was another group that were mostly involved with literature and painting, and I just fell in with– next to a wonderful poet with the name of Peter Hammer who has since died unfortunately too early of cancer. A brilliant, brilliant young man and a wonderful poet who eventually did most of the– several of the films on major poets, American poets. I think he did the one on Robert Lowell and several others in the poetry series on TV. It was a great series, and he was very– simply the best. And I had some wonderful teachers right away. I had Ted Weiss who was a spectacular teacher, and could speak all, all morning about– without a hesitation almost one sentence for the whole thing so that you were caught up in the suspense of it all. And I found later when I began to teach that I picked up many mannerisms of Ted and also of Bill Humphrey who I studied with, and who was a very good friend of mine for many years thereafter. I think a good teacher has that effect on you, where you feel the person’s presence inside of you and you begin to repeat as a child repeats the patterns of a parent, you begin to repeat the patterns of the speech, the way they think, the things they think of. I still, at this late stage of 88 years old, I can still remember walking down to the creek, to the Saw Kill and Bill Humphrey talking about short stories; neither of us having books in our hands, he would practically have a whole story in his head. I’d never seen anything like that. He could recite the beginning of it and then show where it modulated into another key and then moved into a series of expansions and digressions and finally came through at the end. I was astounded by the way in which he thought about it. I think Bard was exciting to me also because someone like Humphrey had never graduated from college, and there he was, a brilliant teacher, just having his first major book *Home from the Hill* published which was a runner up for the National Book Award. But it was a year in which, to use an athlete’s expression, I was stretched, I was shown new ways of thinking, new ways of reading. And it wasn’t so much the knowledge that I got as the spirit of the place, the spirit of learning. And I remember with great clarity sitting in, though I was not allowed to take the course with Heinrich Blucher and finding this astonishing man standing there, without any notes, talking about the great themes and great ideas of western culture. So I think what I felt at Bard was this great spirit of a huge culture that I didn’t know anything about, but which I was being invited into in that year. I don’t think I got an A, I think I got some Bs, and Clair Leonard who taught

music gave me a C out of generosity, I just didn't know anything about music at that time. But it was a year in which fundamentally and centrally my whole person was changed from someone who was afraid of this world, of literature and the arts to someone who deeply, deeply wanted to enter it and was invited into it, and given some of the tools to enter it. As I say, it was one year, and it was a hinge, it moved me into another period of my life. Along with that, I met Mari who was very shy, Mari Blumenau then, we talked more and more and more and by the end of the term, we had decided things were more serious than that, and sort of trailed out to California and married her. That's what I did. And then we had four children in (laughs) rapid succession, and then went on from there. But Bard was— Bard was that great hinge, it was the great moment in my life where I changed from a very rueful and unhappy insurance major, and a boy who had really struggled a great deal to find any passion that had to do with the head, with thinking, growing, and building, writing and went on from there to jump right into graduate school from there. I went from being a freshman to— within a year I was in a MA program three years later I had a doctorate in English and gradually have felt more and more comfortable with the language and I've written twenty-five books, 300 essays, and a lot of other stuff. But it was Bard that gave me that, that push and that spirit, and that vision beyond all the others. The University of Michigan and graduate school was very helpful in bringing me to not only the mechanics but the span, where you put Milton, where you put Thomas Hardy, which— where they all fit together, and it was very helpful in that respect. Bard gave me the spirit, without which I could not have gone on at all. It was a brilliant year for me. One interesting person I met, I don't know whether he stayed and graduated, I think he did, was a man named Jim Martin. Is that name familiar? Is it—

Tieger: Not really, no. What did he teach?

Lyons: I think he married somebody from Bard.

Tieger: Mmhmm—

Lyons: But he was— he was a master sergeant in the Army, in the regular Army in what's called the Parachute Corps and he was someone who threw the boys out the— out of the plane. I went across country with him the summer I drove, the first year after Bard when I drove to meet Mari, who lived on the west coast, and he would have dreams in the middle of the night of throwing people out of planes, one of them had a parachute that didn't open. But Jim had gone to Bard because he wrote a list of those that were near— those that began with A and B that were near New York, and Bard was— Bard just came up, just by chance. I think he loved it, and I think he stayed and finished and married a woman from New Jersey.

Tieger: Well, I'll have to look him up, we'll have to see. So I know we're going to want to ask about Mari a little bit, but since you mentioned going down to the Saw Kill, if this was 1956, the college did own Blithewood by then—

Lyons: Yep.

Tieger: Did you ever swim in the pool? Which is always a perennial favorite of people to talk about that beautiful pool.

Lyons: I didn't. I can remember going down once or twice with Mari who also didn't swim; I'm not a very good swimmer, she's not a swimmer at all, and we would sit there on the cement outsides I remember. I did fish the Saw Kill River. I am a fly-fisher, a trout fisherman by temperament or something. I did fish it and one of the very interesting things was that Zabriskie must have stocked that river with all sorts of exotic fish which don't– aren't there now. But he had Atlantic Salmon in that little creek, and a fish called the ouananiche, a Canadian fish, and I had a wonderful time. I was– everyone was talking about Yeats and Trakl and the other poets, and I would slip down when it got to be too heavy and catch a fish or two, it was fun to do.

Tieger: That's nice.

Lyons: But it was a lovely– it was a remarkable creek, and I met, I still see him, Bobby Bard who came to the– the little–

Tieger: Reception–

Lyons: Reception with Mari's work.

Tieger: So tell us more about Bobby Bard, since he's– I know I was very grateful to finally meet him in person at the reception and what was– how did you meet him and what was your relationship like at that time?

Lyons: I– he was a little younger, I didn't know him well. His father was the I think– believe his father was the groundskeeper and guard, because he caught me once or twice slipping into Mari's dorm (laughs) and complained in the evening and complained to the authorities about that. I think his father was in charge of all the grounds at that time and also served as a night watchman in effect. Bobby was younger, I think he was still a teenager, I really didn't know him other than that he fished a lot and was a friend of Bill Humphrey– Bill Humphrey already knew him through Dick Bard. Dick Bard was the groundskeeper and Humphrey always had an affection for people close to the earth. Bard was a good gunsmith and shot. I've never shot anything. But Bill was a shooter and also a fisherman. And I think I met him some years later when a man named Kevin Begos, b-e-g-o-s, who– an interesting young man who did limited edition books, he did one of my, one of my stories and we made some arrangement– we met and I met Bob then and also met a photographer, not Stephen Shore yes I did meet Stephen Shore then also and another one who was teaching, another photographer who was teaching at Bard who came to the reception that day and we talked about fishing a lot (laughs).

Tieger: Nice. So, let's talk about Mari a little bit, since we did have the reception last summer, 2019, it was a beautiful reception, it was one of our best I would have to say, mostly because

you helped us provide wonderful food. But no, it was a beautiful reception, and the work was well received and why don't you talk more about Mari and her teachers and what Bard meant to her.

Lyons: Of course. Mari had applied to a number of— she had been in a small, rather upscale women's high school in Berkeley, quite famous, called the Anna Head School, now it's called the Head-Royce School I believe. And she had an odd match for parents, her father, whom I liked very much had only had a fourth-grade education. He had come from Latvia I believe, and at a young age was involved with one of the catastrophes in San Francisco, and had rented a horse and carried the drunks back and forth from the— from one of the bars and had gotten into the business of trading and working with animals. He eventually became a cattle rancher and had done reasonably well. He had years when he did very well, he sold a lot of beeves, I think he called them beeves to Hollywood people, and you could always get twice the amount than the cow was worth when you were selling it to— selling it down there. And her mother had come from Riverside Drive in New York. It really was an odd match. Her mother had wanted to go to college, but the— did not. She was having too much fun not going, and made a series of bad choices like that; ended up turning down very, very well-heeled suitors so-to-speak and suddenly she was in her late 30s, was in the depression, and the family lost a lot of its prestige and money. She was invited out to California to meet one of Mari's aunts, and while she was there, they introduced her to Charlie Blumenau who was doing very well selling cows during the depression and she married him. And it was one of those really unfortunate marriages; stayed together, never broke up, but she couldn't get away fast enough. She would go on trips around the world, and usually drag Mari along. It was a very bad relationship. A dominating woman, a shy daughter, who at an early age was very interested in the arts. But Mari had come to Bard from Anna Head, I think frankly she had also applied to Bennington and to Sarah Lawrence and had not gotten into those. She was not a good taker of tests, ever, but she was as devoted and skillful in the arts as anyone I've ever known. She had studied with one summer, Max Beckmann, that would have been 1950, Max Beckmann, the great German expressionist taught at Mills College, and the family wanted her to take swimming lessons so Mari signed up for swimming lessons at Mills and would study with Max Beckmann instead, and every night, she would take her bathing suit, get it wet, and bring it home (laughs). She had always drawn, and had won some— a few contests when she was seven or eight years old, and she saw in Beckmann a complete artist, somebody who was an artist's artist artist, he was painting and thinking about it, and he walked like it, and she watched him paint and the intensity with which he worked. And she loved having him come around with his wife Quappi and look at the work and say "Gut, gut kinder. More black, more black" (laughs) and she would always— always remembered him and felt that just those six weeks at Mills had been a great— great push for her. She also studied with a man named Fletcher Martin who happened to live in Woodstock. So when she came to Bard, one of the things we did as a senior, for the first time she had not looked him up before that, she found out where he lived, and we went to visit him, and eventually bought his house, it's the house we lived in for about 20 years, it was an odd connection. But she went to Bard, and she was enormously fond of Louis Schanker, who was a professor of art. She did not particularly enjoy Harvey Fite, who has since gotten famous for his

Opus 40 and Stefan Hirsch taught them, but did not really touch what Mari was after. She painted constantly, she became very devoted to Heinrich Blucher and I took a tutorial with him and with Malcolm Bilson, the pianist and Malcolm and Mari I think still kept in touch some years, many years later. But she was totally devoted to the painting, and everything else, literature and philosophy, they were all somehow funneled into that ambition she had to be one of the painters. And I think she would have never used the word great painters, but she would just say one of the painters. To be part of the dialog. And that's how I knew her. I met her on the line for registration, I think she was singing Russian revolutionary songs, and I said, "oh boy, here's pretty far out after the Wharton school." She was really very not that far out, her friends were. I remember getting all of her books, she had given her books to Lorelle Marcus for the summer and Lorelle I think kept in close touch with the school, and her husband probably still does, Lorelle has died. But Lorelle was living in Larchmont and had taken all of the books for the summer. I went in the little Ford, picked up this immense number of books, came back, and didn't speak to her for the next month or so, I think I was afraid I'd have to do more jobs (laughs). We slowly began to talk and see more of each other, and I think during field period we met in New York a couple of times. I stayed up— I should say I stayed up at Bard during the winter '56-'57 when the Hungarians came—

Tieger: Oh!

Lyons: That was the first experience I had standing in front of a group of people. I had— I was really afraid to say, hated school, I was one of those people who loved athletics, who did not have the spirit to sit steadily and learn something; felt very restless in school situations. But whoever was teaching English somehow asked me if I would help out, and I said I didn't know Hungarian, they said, "well, we use the Army method of just speaking English. All you do is speak English and that will do it." And I can remember standing up, I had forgotten until now, standing up on a little stage in front of 40 or 50 people and talking about language. You know, this is an arm, or whatever else you would say. And I became friends with some of them, actually with Laszlo Bito who eventually became a donor to Bard of great substance. But I met Mari— after that was over, I think in February, when I went to New York, I saw Mari a great deal, and then in the spring we would spend more and more time together. And I was an odd suitor, I still wasn't sure what I would do with my life, I wanted to make a living reading Shakespeare and all the novelists, I had no thought of going into teaching, no thought of ever being good enough to earn a living writing. And we talked a lot, I had a little money that I had earned from the Army. And in June, we parted, I said I was going to Alaska with Jim Martin, but the Alaska situation didn't work, so I came down to the Bay area, and Mari and I in August decided to get married and got married at her family house in Menlo Park. But she was devoted to Heinrich, always spoke about him as a great mentor, and Louis— went to Louis' shows in New York when we got there. She had a number of close friends but I think I was the first male friend that she'd had. She knew Peni Cenedella who also died of cancer early; brilliant person. And Janet Bodenson(??), Karen Geiger. And she had started, what was most interesting, I didn't know her then, but she had roomed with of all people, Carolee Schneemann, the shy girl from a little girl's school in Oakland, ends up in a room with Carolee and her boyfriend at the time. And it was at

first shocking to her, I think she closed off her room and never came out, and Carolee wrote a beautiful description of her.

Tieger: I have it here because you gave it to us Nick

Lyons: Yep

Tieger: So I'll just read the first two sentences, but it sort of goes on in this vein. It says, "Mari is like a spirit, young child and deep thinker. She is completely naive and infinitely wise; she is a living contradiction." So—

Lyons: (laughs) It does go on and it's— I showed that to Jed Perl the art critic who has followed Mari's work a lot, and he said, "she caught her,"— he never liked Carolee's work, it was a little too far out for him, but he said, "she caught Mari exactly right." And Mari was like that and remained like that, she never— she always was something of a spirit of another place and at the same time very wise, and as I've said, enormously devoted to her painting. I have donated a lot the last year or so, several to Bard that I'm happy to know are some of her best works at Bard. But there are some 400 or more large canvases of the same size that Bard has in a warehouse in Kingston now

Tieger: Wow

Lyons: I need to find homes for them. If anyone wants one

Tieger: I would never say no Nick, so we'll have to talk another time.

Lyons: I can talk a little bit about Mari's

Tieger: What?

Lyons: I can talk a little bit about Mari's commitment after Bard but I'd be glad to hear what you would like to talk about. I'm all wound up! I can talk

Tieger: You're fantastic! You're basically covering most of our questions without us even asking them, it's fabulous. I just wanted to know if you could say a little bit more about why, since you never took a class with Heinrich Blucher, why— I know he was very kind to Carolee too when Carolee left the college at a certain point, I think he sort of took her under his wing. But do you have any insight as to you know, the kindness that was there? I think, you know— do you think it was that the artistic— his interest in the arts? I'm wondering about that.

Lyons: I think Heinrich is one of those great human beings, very wise himself, did very little if any writing of his own, was quite the par of his famous wife, Hannah Arendt. I think he was the kind of person who grew to love the spark of art, the spark of intelligence, the spark of possibility

in young people as well as in older people, and he saw that in Carolee unquestionably. Carolee is a remarkable human being and was as a young person. Mari obviously had a great gift for painting at an early age, I have paintings of hers from when she was twelve that are already really far advanced. And I think that he saw in her a talent, and it was his impulse as a teacher to draw that forth, to encourage it, to draw it forth and support it, which is a very great quality. And I, speaking to Mari and having seen only this one class or two classes of his (unintelligible) I think it was held in the little church in the— and everyone would be sitting—

Tieger: Bard Hall, yeah

Lyons: (unintelligible)

Tieger: Or possibly the chapel, apparently he taught in various places but

Lyons: I was in the chapel. But I think he saw that, as part of his destiny not necessarily to write something himself but to encourage thinking, wisdom, excellence, in a select group of others. He would not do it for everyone. Jed Perl tells me that he often participated in some of the art discussions down in the village, not sure what it was called, but it was a group that met I think at one of the bars de Kooning, Kline, Motherwell, all of the great names of the '40s and '50s. And Heinrich would go to that and talk and be a respected member of that group. And he would go not only to learn himself, but also, that what he learned in a very repressive place, Nazi Germany, he was capable in the rest of his life, of prompting in others, almost as a Plato, as a man who, not the source of knowledge so much as the prompter of knowledge in others. A very rare kind of quality, most teachers, even really good ones are often huge egos that want to share that ego with other people, but are not that interested in drawing forth from a student something, something they see in— At my son Paul's memorial, my oldest son out in California, four or five of his students came and spoke about exactly that quality that Paul would see in them something and find ways to draw it forth, to protect it, and to help it flourish. And I'm very proud of Paul that I in a sense trace it back to Heinrich, who he never met. That it was a thing that went into, I know it went into my life as a teacher, and I think I passed it on to Paul as well. These things, these great ideas, these great qualities of humanity whether you handle them well or not are I think the things that make life so, so precious and so wonderful in so many ways, that with all of the terrible things that happen, that Trump has been the worst— it is the flowering of life force that is so exciting to see and so exciting to be a part of, which is what I found in teaching, when I taught, and eventually in my book publishing, when I could find— never found a Melville but I found some very good authors (smiles and laughs).

Tieger: Well, because it seems silly to to come back to small things when you're talking along that vein, why don't you tell us about, a little bit more about what you did later, about becoming a teacher, you sort of touched on that, but your moving into book publishing, how did that come about?

Lyons: Sure. I began to teach at Michigan as a graduate student, found that I loved it and Mari had gone on from Bard to the Cranbrook Academy in Bloomfield— is Michigan, one of the best graduate art programs in the country. Had done very well, and then she was pregnant very quickly (laughs) and had a child about eleven months after we married, and would paint all of the time right away, even with the first child, and the second and the third, she was always, always painting. But I began to teach then. I got a job at Hunter College and when I finished my doctorate with a great scholar named Austin Warren who meant a lot to me at one time. I got to teach at Hunter. Eventually, it became too difficult, I ran out of the little money I had very quickly, and we suddenly had four children, Mari was painting, she had taught a little bit in Ann Arbor, but other than that I don't think she ever worked again. She would always paint, and I always wanted her to have as much of the day as possible to paint. Within I think four years after we got to New York, I realized that the salary at Hunter, which was— had started at \$5,000 a year, it had gone up to about \$8,000 a year and with four children in New York City, even then it wouldn't go very far. So I racked my brain for what to do, and the only thing I could think of was the publishing world. I had by then become reasonably adept at marking papers and helping people with their essays and work in school; I had done that for six or seven years by that time. And I wrote to 100 book publishers and sent out, not a form letter, but an individually typed letter to three or four of them, I think must have been about 100 all together. And got three replies, not more than that. One from Norton, the president of Norton was a man named Don Lamb another one who had studied with Austin Warren, and then a company called Crown Publishers, which I'd never heard of; they did a whole variety of different kinds of books, and he owned a whole bunch of little companies that he'd bought up after they went bankrupt, it was a strange place in those days. I was hired as a proofreader. In order to take the job, I had to have myself transferred from the day session into the night session at— it was at 68th and Park Avenue. And I would start to work at Crown at about 8:30 in the morning or 9, having taken the children to school first, and I worked as a proofreader for the first year, very diligently, I'd have to leave at about 5 o'clock to get up to my first class at quarter to six. Sometimes the subway wouldn't stop at 68th Street, but would go up to 86th, and I'd rush down and the class would be gone already. At least once or twice a year that would happen, but I had a flair for it. I'm not sure what it was but I had finally found things that I loved. I loved to teach and I loved editing. I loved the process of writing and seeing somebody writing a flap copy, anything like that, and seeing it end up as a book going out into the world and having a certain effect on the world. So in about 15 years I think of doing both jobs, teaching full time at night, full time at Crown, and also doing ghost writing (laughs) on top of it all, somehow on weekends—

Tieger: And going home to four kids, wow!

Lyons: I know. But I became executive editor at Crown, and was executive editor for a couple of years, and Hunter finally said look we let you take the second job much earlier but now you really have to stop; you're either a teacher or a book publisher, and they started to give me a lot of trouble, so I began to think of how to— what else to do, and just about that time, a publisher from England named Timothy Benn who was the head of Ernest Benn Limited, hundred year old British publisher, did very good books, came to me and said, "would you start a little subsidiary

for us?" So I went to the dean and I said, someone wants me to be a consultant for a British firm, and that carries a lot of credibility in the academic world, being a consultant for a British firm sounded like a good thing, but I was actually starting another publishing house

Tieger: (laughs)

Lyons: (laughs) on my dining room table, which I did. I started it— we did something called packaging books, where you produce a whole book, a whole edition, 5,000 copies, and the book is sold, the whole 5,000 is sold to another company before it comes off the press, so you really can't lose money on it, and that's the way they wanted me to do it, it's the only way they wanted me to do it. I guess I did 20 or 30 books that way with Doubleday, Shocken Books, Norton, and several other good companies, produced the books; frustrated as can be when it went into someone else's hands, and then they sold it or didn't sell it or didn't like the book and some of the problem— And then an odd thing happened. Timothy, who was the chairman of the board suddenly ran into some infraction, was told— I mention these because they hinge— all of these little things hinge on other things. Timothy was let go, he was discharged, even though it was the family business. And I was told that they were either going to fold the business, or I could buy it. And I said, "well, there's nothing (laughs) to buy. There's me, the desk, there's my old Underwood typewriter which I use, but all the books have already been sold to other companies." And they said, "well, you know, we— we're not going to accept a little money for something of some size." And I had bargained hard, and bought it very cheaply and raised I think about \$100,000, that paid for them and also I went to Crown and said, "look, there are these 50 books I edited on fishing and outdoor sport and Crown doesn't do those; can I buy those away from them?" And they said, "sure, we'll do that." So I started with the books I had already edited at Crown, the books that Doubleday and the others had, and I promptly set to buying all of those back also. I put together about 100 books all together as— on the firm and we published marvelous people. I found I had a real flair for finding first rate authors. I did the first book by Jon Krakauer who eventually wrote *Into the Wild*, I did David Quammen's first book who has written on natural history at a very high level. I did Verlyn Klinkenborg's first book. I would find very good first book authors like that, and that's, that's not easy. Those people have usually gone to five of the bigger houses and then are reluctantly gone to play with me. And I also found that I could go to people like Tom McGuane and other established writers and say, "look, your novels are terrific, but what do you do? What is your other interests?" McGuane was interested in horses, and I had him do a little book called *Some Horses*. Published John Graves another from Texas, writer, a couple of Nobel Prize winners in the natural history. Pretty soon, I had a very nice functioning house, publishing house, and at that time, I was able to quit Hunter College and stop doing ghost writing and stop doing anything but doing some writing of my own and publishings, these nice books that I love to pieces. But at that time, my youngest son had become a lawyer and found out that he disliked law. He was a very aggressive, anxious, energetic fellow, Tony, and he was working for Viacom in the law department and didn't like it. So I said, "come down and work with me." And he came down, my partner got scared and quit (laughs) he thought Tony was the biggest mistake, and that Tony was just too strong, that he was going to push everyone out. And before I knew it we sold the place and

that's how I got enough money to buy a house in Woodstock, and live for the rest of my life without, without having to work, really, if I watched the money. Tony tripled the size of the business in a matter of two years and ended up selling it for— he sold it for much more than I imagined he could get for it; because they were good books. And because I really had done not just topical books or fads, but books that I thought would last. Some of them are still— a lot of them are still in print. It's been sold a couple of times since then, but it was a nice— it was an interesting career. At that time about 18 years ago, I was able to spend the rest of my life writing, which I did a lot of, published about 22 books all together, and edited another ten, and put them together with my name as the editor, the introducer and so forth; did one on Hemmingway, did one on Robert Traver who wrote *Anatomy of a Murder*. So I've had a very good 18 years since then, and sadly Mari died about four years ago of cancer. It struck fast and came back fast and she could not be saved. And the last couple of years I have been trying very hard to see how that shy girl could get a little more attention, and put her good paintings in good places that she'd be proud of. She's now in the New York State Museum, they have some of the good very big paintings of hers, and Mills College has some. And about seven or eight colleges and museums in Montana have some as well. I just keep going—

Tieger: Well, I think we are coming— we are closing in on our hour and you've done such a beautiful job of creating an arc without even— with very, very little prompting, you I guess must know your own life, but (laughs)

Lyons: (laughs)

Tieger: But, this is wonderful. I wonder if you have any sort of, any— you're 88, happy belated birthday last week was your birthday, maybe—

Lyons: It was

Tieger: —at this time of really frightening times do you have a piece of advice for the next generation, the people coming into the world now?

Lyons: That's a good question. It's so— it's such a different world, than the one I had. I should say this to wrap up my feelings about Bard, just a second, before I say a few things about that. I have been thrilled to go back for the music, which I have gone to seven or eight performances there in the summers. It's been a delight to see the growth of Bard at a place of such substance, which you of course know. Totally different from what I left. Happy to see a grandson of mine go to Bard, he even wants to play basketball at Bard! And I remember that I put together the first grubby basketball team that Bard ever had (laughs).

Tieger: Oh! I didn't know that.

Lyons: [59:58] (unintelligible?) It's been a pleasure to see and it's been a pleasure to see the kinds of ideas that still animate Bard; different, newer, but the same electricity involved. You know when that letter I wrote out to the paper, I should mention that Reamer Kline was

president then, called me up and asked me to have lunch with him at the Union Club. I had lunch with him and he said in the middle of the meal, he cracked a lobster and he said, "what would you think if I said I was going to sue you?" and I said, "I'm sorry," and he says, "I didn't like the piece that you wrote." I thought he was going to offer me a job, (laughs) and he wanted to sue me for writing something against Bard. Really, was a you know paean a love of Bard that I had written and that I had heard some things about the change at that particular time. But as of today, I'm very fortunate among my grandchildren to have at least two that are— there's the young man going to Bard, whom I like very much. His sister is now 23 and went to Wellesley and played Lear in King Lear; they do all women performances. And I have another granddaughter, Elsa Lyons, my son's, Tony's child, whom I corresponded with twice a week by email, we send long letters back and forth, she's fourteen and she's just wonderful. She is actually the hope for the world, and Laura who's 23 and on her own. And I think it is; Yeats has that wonderful poem where he says, "come from that [actually "the"] holy fire, perne in a gyre," and the center, the pole keeps this whirling gyre steady. It's an image that you get over and over again in Yeats of being in that silent centerpiece, and it's something that you find in the eastern religions as well to find that peace. I think it's something the world must have and the world must get rid of the demagogues, it must put them in a trash bin someplace, it must come to some order other— I think it will come to more, but it's being tugged in so many different ways. Tugged by disease, and possibly the diseases are a result of the climate, it's conceivable that fussing around with all of our chemicals and the like gets rid of some of the diseases, but allows others to come in. I heard the other day— a friend of mine drove in from Cleveland, and he said that there were 53 dead deer on the highway. I couldn't believe it for a minute. And the only explanation I had was that they had gotten used to a world without fast cars, and that this is the breeding season, the birthing season so there are a lot of young ones out and they simply didn't see the danger. And we are the danger. And I think increasing knowledge of climate, and increasing respect for what's left of the natural world and in one's own work to put some of the greed aside as much of it as you can, and to concentrate on that center part, that stillness that would make everyone of us a really better person.

Tieger: Wow, well that is beautiful, that's a beautiful—

Lyons: How do I know?

Tieger: Yeah

Lyons: Being 88, when I'm 100 I'll know

Tieger: If you're loud (laughs)

Lyons: (laughs) Good. I hope, I hope that's some fun

Tieger: It is very, it's lovely, thank you so much

Hallett Gutierrez: Yes, it's wonderful, thank you

Lyons: Thank you for wanting me to say something. I've always wanted to give back something to Bard, but never had the money to give a big chunk of that. Giving some paintings of Mari's was a great pleasure for me, to see them up on the walls and in that room, and to give some students some pleasure up there, sleeping or working, or whatever they do. It's nice to have them there, and it was wonderful of Helene to put together the exhibit of Mari and her work. I think she's a great painter and I think she— of the thousand paintings she did, I think probably three or four hundred of them are not mistakes, but they're not completed paintings in the sense that she's trying something out, but I— in my life I would like to see her recognized, and I'm grateful to Bard for all that Bard has done to keep her on Earth a little more alive.

Tieger: Well thank you Nick, very much, it's our pleasure and we will be in touch. I'm going to turn off the recording now

Lyons: Okay

Tieger: And, Anna, thank you, you don't have to go away just yet, but thank you so much

Hallett Gutierrez: Yes, thank you so much

Lyons: Thanks