

**INTERVIEW WITH MELVIN SIMPSON  
DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY**

**January 11, 1988**

**Dr. Hartzell:** This is an interview with Dr. Melvin Simpson of the Department of Biochemistry on January 11, 1988. All right, we have these questions, Mel, and as long as this little light is on, things are going reasonably well.

**Dr. Simpson:** Do I need to talk loudly or is this okay.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I think that will pick it up.

**Dr. Simpson:** Okay, fine.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Question 1, name, department, rank or position.

**Dr. Simpson:** Okay, Melvin V. Simpson, Department of Biochemistry, American Cancer Society Professor.

**Dr. Hartzell:** American Cancer Society Professor?

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see, do you want to explain that.

**Dr. Simpson:** Oh, well, that's, we had one other person at Stony Brook who had that award, that was Seymour Cohen, given for particularly meritorious work. If I hadn't been chairman of the department, I would have continued to be on a salary paid by the Cancer Society rather than Stony Brook, it's a lifetime award. If you take an administrative position, you have to give up the salary, but you can still retain the title and the nice thing about it is they give me \$10,000 a year whether I ask for it or not, to be used in research, so it's a nice little bonus.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What year did you come to Stony Brook?

**Dr. Simpson:** 1966.

**Dr. Hartzell:** How old were you at the time?

**Dr. Simpson:** So, it seems impossible, but 45, it's hard to believe.

**Dr. Hartzell:** From what institution and position did you come?

**Dr. Simpson:** I was an American Cancer Society Professor at Dartmouth, and I came from there. Prior to that I was at Yale for many years.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Do you know anyone in biophysics?

**Dr. Simpson:** No, what are you thinking?

**Dr. Hartzell:** I was going to Ernie Pollard.

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, yeah, I knew Ernie Pollard at Yale.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Who was primarily responsible for your coming to Stony Brook?

**Dr. Simpson:** I think Bentley Glass. Bentley Glass had heard that there was a huge eruption at Dartmouth, and as a result of it a big internal battle, the molecular biologists were leaving, and it was a very powerful molecular biology center up there, and he came up and made hay or tried anyway to recruit people. And I heard that C. N. Yang was here, but I had never heard of Stony Brook before.

**Dr. Hartzell:** That's quite possible.

**Dr. Simpson:** I figured that, Gosh, if Yang was here, it must be a place with lots of possibilities, so.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Who interviewed you for the position here?

**Dr. Simpson:** I guess it was Frank Erk.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Frank Erk, is that right. He was chairman of the Department then?

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Why did you come?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, it was really fertile ground, a new University, there wasn't a biochemistry department, so I could start forming one from scratch.

**Dr. Hartzell:** They wanted you to do that?

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes. And I could see myself getting things accomplished without a battle about everything since this was kind of a nice big oasis, and you could do what you pleased, more than you had at Dartmouth.

**Dr. Hartzell:** .....

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, I wasn't in that position at Dartmouth, I wasn't the chairman there. In fact, in those days I really didn't want to be. In fact, I was looking for a horizontal move. Being an American Cancer Society Professor, being paid by the Cancer Society is a nice position to be in, you're not obligated to the University, your time is your own, you spend full-time on research, but I felt that this place had a lot of opportunities.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What was your understanding of the purposes behind the creation of Stony Brook, what was the vision being transformed into reality?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, it was to be a full fledged University, and I liked that. In fact, I liked being at a University more than I do at a med school, and I'd only been at medical schools before. And I'm interested in many intellectual activities which are absent from medical schools, for example, I take courses in archeology here. .... have friends in various departments. I expected this to be a first-class University, I didn't quite buy the Berkeley of the East because I remember that, and that didn't fool me at all because I know that it takes a very long time, and I knew that, to create a first-class place. Nevertheless, I thought this would become a very good place.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What were your impressions of Stony Brook when you first came, the campus, the people, the leadership and the spirit?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, with respect to the campus I suppose that's illustrated by a story we all know when the line of students formed outside of Johnny Toll's office and each of whom was carrying a Dixie cup full of mud and they planted all of this on his desk and marched out, do you remember that? Well, that's about how the campus was, but it was very exciting, because I don't remember the number, but if I were to say that 30 buildings were being built at about that time all at once, I wouldn't be very far from being accurate. There were a lot of buildings built at the same time, so the campus was muddy. Now, what else was there, not only the campus part

**Dr. Hartzell:** Not only the campus, the people and the leadership, atmosphere.

**Dr. Simpson:** Yeah, well, I though the leadership was really just so-so, to tell you the truth, with the exception of Johnny Toll. I thought he was a tremendous builder, which was quite true that if you came to Johnny that he really wouldn't listen part of the time, but if you came to him with a proposition, and I decided then I would work just through Bentley and Johnny Toll. If you came to him and you were trying to recruit somebody who was really hot and very good, I had never seen anybody jump up and down and get so excited as Johnny Toll. Therefore, it was encouraging if you were a chairman at that time, it was tremendously encouraging. He was very positive, and he was a great builder. In fact, I think he left when he should have left, all the building was over. It was just right.

**Dr. Hartzell:** He went after high quality, and I think Sam Gould was after the same thing.

**Dr. Simpson:** I didn't know him at all, in fact, don't know much about that era.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What events, what persons, what experiences stand out?

**Dr. Simpson:** Oh, yeah, I have a few stories to tell. Well, first of all I'd like to comment about Bentley Glass. Bentley to us in biology was absolutely terrific, extremely positive, he had a very good knowledge of people in the field and who was good and who wasn't. If you came to Bentley with a really good proposition, even with respect to recruiting, all a good idea you got a positive response. I think Bentley was particularly good to biochemistry, and I have said that many times in introducing him here and there, so I'll never forget that, he was just terrific.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Well, to be a geneticist, you have to be a biochemist.

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, you don't have to, at least in those days you didn't, but he was unusual, he had a certain kind of genius. He used to write summaries of highly technical biochemical meetings, these meetings were held in Baltimore in Hopkins, they were the Johns Hopkins meetings, they may have had some other name, and the summaries were absolutely outstanding, these volumes. So, Bentley is an unusual person, and I think he made life, he made life very nice.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Anybody else besides John Toll and Bentley?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, of course there is Ed Pellegrino, so I should mention how I got to know Pellegrino, and how it came to be that he came here. I mentioned a little earlier in this interview this big battle at Dartmouth. It was a battle of the old versus the new, and almost a classical battle. In this case the

**Dr. Hartzell:** Who was chairman of biology?

**Dr. Simpson:** This wasn't in biology, this was in the medical school, and I don't remember. This was in the med school itself, and basically the fight was between biochemistry, microbiology on the one hand and the other departments on the other, which were very classical departments. Now, as a result of this fight, the Dean was forced to resign because he took sides, which was a bad thing to do. He should have knocked all heads, not just taken off on us. So, we were looking around for another dean, and somebody, I no longer remember who, suggested Pellegrino. Pellegrino came and, I must say, with molecular biologists, they were just taken by him. We thought he was terrific, and we felt that he would play a center role, but a very firm one, and would stop all this nonsense. So, we were all for Ed, the other side was not, absolutely opposed, and so Ed didn't get the offer. And after a few months the whole thing broke down, and 21 people left within a few months, within a year, let us say. But I remember Pellegrino. When I came here the medical school was just in the planning stage, and Bentley, perhaps Bentley asked me or perhaps I volunteered this, I knew we were looking for a head of the whole business, and I suggested Ed Pellegrino, and told them the story of Ed, how outstanding a person we thought he was, was clearly a great builder, it came across. And from there on out Bentley took over and Pellegrino was recruited, so that's the story.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Well, it was certainly a tremendous appointment.

**Dr. Simpson:** Oh, yeah, great builder. And I do have another story that came to mind, and that is how the Fine Arts Center got approved for being built. In this story I was simply an instrument, but it's an interesting story nevertheless. Bentley knew I was interested in classical music, and I wanted that Fine Arts Center very much. You know

there weren't very many people here in those days, so everybody talked to everybody. And there was a visitor to the campus who was an old war-time friend of mine and who was one of the world's great musicologists, his name is Joe Kerman, and in fact he was a distinguished lecturer here many years later. He's come a number of times, the last time as a distinguished lecturer. Anyway, Joe stayed over at my house, and I suggested to Bentley that, you know, we have such a fantastic music department, if I could get Joe to say so and to give an estimate of that, of our music department, Bentley had informed me -- excuse me, I'm talking a little bit ahead of myself here. Bentley had told me that the following day he was going up to Albany to a meeting to push for the Fine Arts Center, and it was at that meeting that the decision would be made whether to build it or not. I said I could write down exactly what Joe Kerman said, and Bentley said it's a terrific idea, get it to me and put it under my door as late as necessary. And so I spent the evening with Joe, he was staying over, and he gave an assessment of the department which was a tremendous assessment. I wrote it all up, typed it up with typing errors and everything else, got it under Bentley's door at 2 a. m. Bentley got it in the morning and flew to Albany and Bentley said that the letter was instrumental in getting the Fine Arts Center approved. So it was really Joe Kerman and Bentley that I happened to be an instrument in that, and I'm rather proud of that.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Oh, you certainly need all kinds of instruments when you are dealing with the central office. Anything else.

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes, let me think.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Experiences, did you have any conferences here?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, I used to be chairman of a study section, an NIH Fellowship section, and I had them here a few times, it's not really a conference. We'd work at night, and I'd take them sailing in the daytime. I was a great sailor. But, no I didn't initiate conferences, I must say that Masiari Inouye did, he was chairman until, and he initiated a continuing conference, which is now internationally known, and which we have every year.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What's the name of it?

**Dr. Simpson:** Stony Brook, do you want the official name?

**Dr. Hartzell:** Yes.

**Dr. Simpson:** Shut that off for a minute, I'll get it for you.

**Dr. Hartzell:** All right.

**Dr. Simpson:** I may as well get the name. Is it on?

**Dr. Hartzell:** Yes, she's going.

**Dr. Simpson:** The formal name is Stony Brook Symposium on Molecular Biology, the topic varies from year to year. There have been seven conferences so far, the eighth is coming up, and it's usually advertised in ..... The only symposium I could tell you about, which I had nothing to do with, was offered by ..... on my sixty-fifth birthday, but I'm not sure that's of interest to the University.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What was the subject of the conference?

**Dr. Simpson:** Oh, I think the subjects were varied because all my former students and post-docs and collaborators, some of whom are very famous

**Dr. Hartzell:** When was it held?

**Dr. Simpson:** Okay, October 10, 1986. I'd forgotten all about it, and I happened to pick this folder up with the item.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Did you have any relations with Brookhaven?

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes, we started relations with Brookhaven, I did, very early, perhaps in my first or second year as chairman.

**Dr. Hartzell:** You came as chairman, is that right?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, there wasn't anything to be chairman of at that time, so I came as a professor and started to recruit people for a biochemistry section in the Division of Biological Sciences. As soon as there were enough people so that it would be worthwhile for us to have a secretary and an office and everything else, we became a department. So I think maybe two years elapsed before, and that I don't remember accurately, before we became

**Dr. Hartzell:** You were recruiting then from 1966 to 1969, 1970.

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, I was recruiting until I stopped being chairman, and I was chairman for about ten years.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Ten years, I see. You had a relation with Brookhaven.

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes, that's right. So a number of people were appointed as adjunct professors from the Brookhaven Lab, and we continued that kind of thing. One of them, a very important person, Bill Studier, is still with us, and we see him quite often.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What is his work, what

**Dr. Simpson:** He's, at that time he was interested in the physical chemistry of DNA. He now has gotten more biological, and he's famous for elucidating the mode of replication and transcription, just about everything we know about a particular virus known as T7, it's a bacterial virus. And he's brilliant, he received a presidential award, he's one of these people you like to talk about because he works in a very small lab, not a big operation, but is up with, a person of genius. We also have had equivalent relationships with Cold Spring Harbor. In fact, the Department, through the influence of Bentley, helped out Cold Spring Harbor very much in its dark days, thank goodness it doesn't need help any more, it's rich, but in those days before Jim Watson took over, there was a problem of keeping someone at Stony Brook, and I say someone because his name escapes me now, but I know him very well, and because they could not offer him tenure, and we did. They wanted to keep him very badly, we said okay, if something happens at Cold Spring Harbor, and his salary can't be paid, we'll do it. Bentley approved this, it was approved by the President, he would become a member of this department.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Not Vince Cirillo.

**Dr. Simpson:** No, no, Vince was a regular member of this department, no this was, well, I'll get you his name after, I just have to think of it, it's ridiculous that I can't.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Did you deal at all with Albany yourself.

**Dr. Simpson:** No, no, I didn't. There were times when I was tempted to fight for certain things. I thought I would waste my career battling Albany, so I didn't, and I usually circumvented Albany by sometimes legal and sometimes other means, but I wasn't willing to deal with Albany.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay. Influences, you couldn't get support or understanding or comprehension.

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, Albany was very bureaucratic, and I remember the difficulty we used to have with capital equipment or things of that sort. It was excruciating. But you either devoted yourself to that or you devoted yourself to research and taking care of your department. So it was that and other things which I no longer remember, but I do remember the sense of frustration in dealing with Albany. And I remember also with respect to, I was very heavily involved in the design, I don't mean architecturally speaking, but in the planning and whatnot of the medical school. There were very few people here then, you see. Ed was here and a few other people, myself, on every search committee. At any rate Albany was horrible in that respect, with respect to the planning of the medical school. There was a guy there, I think his name was Stevens

**Dr. Hartzell:** Yes, Elwin Stevens.

**Dr. Simpson:** Impossible, I remember the frustration, but of course, Ed Pellegrino really had to deal, he was very good.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Do you remember Al Knudson?

**Dr. Simpson:** Yeah, of course, yes.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I'm going to interview him on the 19th.

**Dr. Simpson:** Give him my very best regards.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I will, right. What was your understanding of your own place in the future of Stony Brook? Why do you think you were appointed? You went over that to a certain extent, but let's review it

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, I came here to become chairman, so that's clear.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Chairman of

**Dr. Simpson:** Of biochemistry, and so that turned out okay.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What about relations between, or the place of biochemistry in the Ph. D. program and in the medical school.

**Dr. Simpson:** Yeah, I could say something about that. For a while when there was plenty of money, it was, first of all a very good thing to be both in the core campus and in the med school because you could get support from both. At that time we didn't want to shift over to the medical school, there was a big move to try to get us to shift over. Bentley was opposed to it, I was too because we had a tremendous amount of TA support, and we wouldn't be able to get very much in the medical school.

**Dr. Hartzell:** CA?

**Dr. Simpson:** TA, Teaching Assistant.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Yes, right.

**Dr. Simpson:** Support for graduate students, and so that was ideal, there was a lot of it, and on the other hand, when money became tight, biochemistry tended to fall through the cracks a little bit because the core campus would say, well, try the med school, and the med school would do the same, so there was that. There was a point there when we decided, it was a low point on the core campus, and we thought maybe it would be a good idea to shift over to the medical school. But at that point there was a lot of politics involved, and some of the people in the med school, Maynard Dewey being one and Vanderkloot who was chairman of physiology then being another, suddenly developed a great affection for the Division of Biological Sciences, saying that we should stay here and support the Division, but in reality they were worried about competition for funds if we went over there. So that pretty well scotched it. Right now things are very good, and I think that whether we went over there or stayed here wouldn't make much difference. We are getting support from both, particularly with the new Dean, who is really very refreshing and a go-getter, a very intelligent, energetic

**Dr. Hartzell:** What's his name?

**Dr. Simpson:** Jordan Cohen, we think he's terrific, absolutely terrific.

**Dr. Hartzell:** That's good. He succeeded Marvin Kushner.

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see. How have your expectations worked out, expectations with which you came to the University, both personally and institutionally?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, I'm pretty positive about Stony Brook. I don't have blind and unrealistic expectations about places or people, and so I didn't expect magic. I know that I complained a good deal to Johnny Toll about, and this is still true, and I still don't like it, about people who simply do not live in the area. Now, I have a great resentment of people of that sort. I don't think they should be around. I think they should be kicked out with the exception of performing artists, there is no question. performing artists have to be in New York, and if you can get a really good one to come out here, it's great. But other than that, too many people to whom students have no access, fellow faculty members have no access, they are never around, and Johnny told me, well, he couldn't help it at that time. Stony Brook was young and you really couldn't get good people unless you did that. But it's remained, and I tell you, if I were president, I would really do something about it. Okay, that just gets something off my chest for the record. However, I think Stony Brook is clearly on the way up, and the way up is not a linear, smooth linear path, it has plateaus and it has downhills and whatnot. The Biochemistry Department for two or three years has been in a rather plateau or even a little downhill. We now have recruited a fantastic chairman, a very famous guy

**Dr. Hartzell:** What's his name?

**Dr. Simpson:** Lennarz, Bill Lennarz, he's now president of the Society of Biological Chemists, very famous scientist, and so we're really rolling again. I think most of the medical school departments, insofar as basic sciences go, the only thing that I am really competent to talk about, are very good. In this building there are excellent departments, the Division of Biological Sciences

**Dr. Hartzell:** Talk about that just a little bit because I want to make sure that I understand how the old department has gradually been sub-divided as it grew.

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes, yes, right. Well, things started off, suppose I start with 1966, and sometime if you get around to it, Vince Cirillo can fill you in from 1964 to 1966. There was just the Division of Biological Sciences. I think Frank Erk would have preferred to keep it as one Division, and it was called a department, and he didn't like the idea of my calling biochemistry the division of biochemistry because he didn't like the word, he didn't like the department to be divided, so we called it biochemistry section. Section means the same thing though. There were no other divisions or categories. Biochemistry was the first one, and then I recall we were recruiting, trying to recruit an ecologist, and we got Larry Slobodkin. And when Larry came, he started recruiting. So we had then biochemistry and ecology, and I wish I could help you with the exact years in which this happened, that's a problem but if you interview Larry Slobodkin he can probably tell you when he arrived.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I've already interviewed him.

**Dr. Simpson:** Okay, so you have the dates. And the last to be formed was neurobiology. And so these are three important departments. Now one other reorganization took place about three years ago or four years ago. These new departments did not include certain people who were doing other things in science. They didn't really include very well Frank Erk, and they didn't include a number of other people.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Bob Merriam.

**Dr. Simpson:** Exactly, there were a number of others. But neither were these people doing the same things so they couldn't have a separate department, so what happened was in the reorganization various people were assigned to the existing departments, and so we had a number of them in biochemistry. And some of them are good researchers, some of them are only teachers but it wasn't that, it's just that they were doing things which didn't fit well in existing categories, and that's worked out very well. I don't think anybody is terribly unhappy, and we treat the people, you know, ..... has a lot of research money, is a good researcher, but in any case we treat them as though they were

biochemists, regular members of the department. I don't know how they feel about it, but as far as, we don't feel they are second class citizens.

**Dr. Hartzell:** There was a group I heard that left for Princeton.

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Where did they come from and where

**Dr. Simpson:** From Princeton, they came from Princeton and they went back there. Well, biology at Princeton had really gone downhill. This happens at all universities in one discipline or another, it happened at Harvard twenty years previous. And so biology which would have been a major force in Princeton simply was down to almost zero. And Princeton resolved to fix it up and got a hold of \$40 million or some such figure, a lot of money, and attracted the people here amongst others and so they left. It was not a question of unhappiness with Stony Brook however, they had a real good department downstairs and very productive and as far as I know they were pretty happy here, but you can't resist that. Princeton to start with its \$40 million and so it's an offer you can't refuse.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Somebody gave it to them.

**Dr. Simpson:** I don't know whether it was one person, but they, I don't know the origins of the money except I know they had a big campaign, but I do not know how many individuals were involved.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay, let's see, did you yourself ever do any work at Brookhaven?

**Dr. Simpson:** No, no.

**Dr. Hartzell:** You didn't need any of the other big machines, in other words.

**Dr. Simpson:** No, no. I used to be on some committees there.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I see. To what extent was your field involved in bringing chemistry or neuroscience

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes, to a reasonable extent because I think I saw the future very, very early as far as neurosciences. I felt that molecular biology was the way to go in neurosciences. And so I recruited somebody very early in the game, Jacob Schmidt, who

is a neuroscientist and he is still with us. He's a member of the program and that kind of thing. Of course, what they are doing now is hiring molecular biologists upstairs.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Upstairs?

**Dr. Simpson:** That is in neurosciences. The field at that time was mainly one of electrical activity in the system, ion penetration channels and that sort of thing, and it is still very important. Molecular biology has now entered the game.

**Dr. Hartzell:** What's the chemical basis for being a genius?

**Dr. Simpson:** Don't know.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Well, one question was what do you feel you have accomplished at Stony Brook, you have outlined that, do you want to summarize it?

**Dr. Simpson:** I started the department, I think the department is a pretty good one. There was a time when it was an outstanding one until Inouye left, because with Inouye a number of other people left to go with him.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Where did he go?

**Dr. Simpson:** He went to, it's like Montezuma's revenge in this sense, he went to Rutgers. It was very clear that Alec liked people at Stony Brook, so he got Inouye. Inouye is very, very good scientist, and I don't know whether he did the right thing or not. I didn't think he did the right thing. But Inouye was fed up with the administration. He wasn't easy to deal with himself, but the administration wasn't very responsive, that includes Jack, I'll put that on the record. I think there's been a change, maybe as a result of that with Jack, I have to say, because they have so responsive to us, I mean he didn't like, he didn't realize first of all the stature of Inouye, and I got a meeting together, although I wasn't chairman, and we all went to see Jack, and we told him about him and what was happening, could Jack do anything if it might not be too late. He was on the verge of accepting the offer and Jack asked, is he really that good, and he asked around the table. He didn't know, he was insulated, and then he gave us everything, it was too late. And from that point on, he has been terrific, and I think he really felt, it is my estimate, that he goofed on Inouye. At any rate, I think the administration is being very

good to us, extremely so. And of course it's the science now, it's clearly the seminar science, the biological science, in the whole business of cloning and everything else comes from biochemistry and molecular biology, everybody is using it, everybody else uses clinical methods, but it all starts with molecular biology, so it's very important to have a powerful setup here.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Do you think there is any subdivision between the mind and the self in chemical functions?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, I'm not sure I'm the right person to ask. As a biochemist I have to say that I don't see there is any meaning in that question, that's perhaps the way a biochemist would answer it, and I honestly don't see the meaning of the question, which probably should tell you something, it's an answer in itself.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I'm interested in the structure of values and both as dependent upon categories of objective reality and the categories of the valuer and you get into the structure of man himself. You have to deal with the body, brain, then what we call the mind and then what has been known as the soul or the self or the ego, id, super-ego or the psyche

**Dr. Simpson:** No question that there are higher levels of organization, that is, I don't think it all stems from the passage of one electrical current from one cell to another, but it's all in here.

**Dr. Hartzell:** It's all inside the skull, yes.

**Dr. Simpson:** Levels of organization, no question about it, and I think it's very clear that one cannot, some physicists think maybe you can, but you have to know far more than we know now, but if you had a particular level of organization, and if you add up all the components in it, you will still not be able to predict everything about what a higher level of organization would do. And that's what you're talking about, nevertheless, it's still .....

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay. Are there questions that I should have asked you?

**Dr. Simpson:** No, I have a feeling I'm forgetting things with respect to incidents and stories which reflect development of Stony Brook.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Two things then, the quality of your students, both undergraduate and graduate, and the character of student life as you have seen it; and the quality of the faculty and the extent to which there is a community of scholars.

**Dr. Simpson:** I think the community of scholars is lacking somewhat, and I thought that might be partly due to the structure of the place, although as I said, Jerry Schubel has tried very hard to do something about it and there has been some improvement. Also I blame it somewhat on young people who I find tend to be less cultivated, less interested in things other than what they are doing than they used to be in my day, there is a lot less intellectual ferment going on amongst these people than there was in my day. They're just as good at their own thing, but much less interested in other intellectual pursuits.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Do you think this is a matter of genetic characteristics?

**Dr. Simpson:** No, no, I don't think so, you try to find somebody in this department who is interested in classical music, you'll really hunt. Vince Cirillo is to some extent, and likewise in art and what's going on in the art world. It's terrible, really terrible.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Any interest in politics?

**Dr. Simpson:** Well, some people do, some are not, but some people tend to be interested in politics, but that's a different category. I'm talking about intellectual activities as a University. Then I went on to the undergrads, didn't I, and I mention how that got started, that I came here determined not to have an undergraduate program at all, that it was strictly to be high quality graduate education. But after a couple of years we found ourselves pressured by undergraduates who were very good. In those days the admission to Stony Brook, those averages I remember for admission was about 92, so we had very good undergraduates coming in. The pressure became very, very high from them, not from the administration and so we started an undergraduate program, and we did make it an elite program. We didn't want thousands, we wanted really good people, and the way we did that was to make the requirements high, not artificially high, but we

didn't permit our undergraduates to take the baby physics courses or baby chemistry courses, nor baby math courses. They, of course, didn't have to take all the courses that physicists or chemists just

**Dr. Hartzell:** Baby meaning

**Dr. Simpson:** You know, usually physics for biology majors, for example, no, we wouldn't permit that. And so we ended up, and since a majority of these people were interested in the M. B. program and getting into med school, they were pre-meds, there was some self-selection there. So, we had and have a very good undergraduate foundation in biochemistry. The graduate students, which had ups and downs, we have a good collection of graduate students, but in order to get this good collection we have to go fishing, and we've done a good deal of fishing in the pond of foreigners. We don't object to foreigners, it's just that when you have to do that, it means that you are not getting enough people, really good people, applying who are natives, and we'd like more of those. With our new chairman we are going to turn our attention to that problem. As I mentioned part of it has to do with a program that is called molecular biology, the department is called biochemistry, those names, which were once very fashionable and attractive, are now a bit old hat, and we're even going through a little p. r. and change the names to something which is a little more attractive to the modern day student.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Your faculty who have gone on have gone into teaching or even research, the students you had.

**Dr. Simpson:** Yes.

**Dr. Hartzell:** And they have become faculty members elsewhere, they should be helping you with your recruiting.

**Dr. Simpson:** Oh, they may well, I'm not sure whether they do or they don't, but they may well, they have good positions in various places, I must say.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Do you keep in touch with them?

**Dr. Simpson:** Yeah, sure, but not as a department so much, each individual does. Most of these people become your friends for life, either they are your sons and daughters

if they've been your graduate students or your friends if they've been your post-docs. I keep in touch with almost all of them, and I think everyone else does. They come back and visit.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Okay. I think you've said something about the structure of the buildings as tending to separate people or tending to group people in one or more common disciplines, they don't get outside. We really need a faculty club.

**Dr. Simpson:** Now, this is something a good many people have thought a lot about. Faculty clubs, of course, work very well in big cities. We need one, but the question is will it work. I don't know. People tend to drive home in five minutes or seven minutes or something. In New York City for example at Columbia, I used to go there very often because there is something there called the Enzyme Club, which used to meet at Columbia, although it no longer doesn't, it meets at the Rockefeller, and I became acquainted with, what happened there was if you had something to do that evening, go into a concert, you'd eat at the Columbia Faculty Club, and you'd meet other people. So it really works in New York City. Whether it would work here or not, I don't know.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Well, you have over a hundred people coming to the concerts.

**Dr. Simpson:** But it's so easy to go home and eat.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Yes, that's right.

**Dr. Simpson:** That's the problem, home is five, seven minutes away. So, I don't know the answer to that, that is something somebody ought to go into.

**Dr. Hartzell:** There would be a need at lunchtime, and they are trying

**Dr. Simpson:** It's been going for about a year, hasn't it, yah. I've always had the urge to go, and I end up not doing it. I grab my ten minute can of sardines and continue working, that's the problem, although I know I would meet a lot of people that I would like to meet.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I think they need a large, round table there so that people can

**Dr. Simpson:** You know what used to happen when the thing used to meet in Chemistry years ago, there was this faculty, the chemists all would sit together, there was

too much of that, and I came a number of times, and it was, you'd basically have to break into something, you were always welcome if you did, but people didn't try to mix up, and so it didn't work.

**Dr. Hartzell:** I think one of the problems is in the background of the faculty that we are getting now, the lack of interest outside their fields.

**Dr. Simpson:** I think that's probably true, I've seen that, what can you do about it.

**Dr. Hartzell:** The training is certainly highly specialized. Well, I think I've taken enough of your time, and I'm sorry that I didn't get underway

**Dr. Simpson:** That didn't matter, as I said I had things

[end of interview]