CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Eleanor Lerman

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Eleanor Lerman conducted by Thomas G. Weiss on June 8, 2012. This interview is part of the Carnegie Corporation of New York Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

3PM | Session #1

Interviewee: Eleanor Lerman | Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: Thomas G. Weiss | Date: June 8, 2012

Q: This is [Thomas] Tom [G.] Weiss interviewing Eleanor Lerman on the eighth of June, 437 Madison Avenue, twenty-sixth floor conference room. Well, good morning. Let's start at the beginning. Just tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what of that infant and adolescent baggage you think you are still carrying with you and what impact that has on the way you approach your day-to-day job.

Lerman: I think the only relevant answer is that I've spent most of my life, in one way or another, as a writer and being a writer makes me a good editor. And since a good deal of my day is working as an editor, I think the reason that I've been successful at my job, to whatever extent I have been successful, is that I can empathize on both sides of the fence, both as the writer and as the editor. I grew up—just very briefly—I grew up in New York, in the Bronx and in Rockaway [Queens].

Q: But did you start writing when you were five or fifteen? When you say you've always been a writer—some of us used to be football players and decided to do something else—but you always wanted to be a writer?

Lerman: I always knew, yes, that that's what I was going to do.

Q: And [laughs] where did that manifest itself? In the English class or on your own?

Lerman: Probably mostly on my own. I had some excellent teachers in school. It was unusual, I think, in that I had teachers who exposed us to Shakespeare very young and I was in a group of smart kids who wanted to be things that you wouldn't think kids wanted to be—archaeologists—and everybody, very young, had some goal. It was an odd group of kids and so it wasn't unusual to say that you wanted to be this or that. And I just knew. I was writing from the time I was young and it was never—well, there was a time in my life it was a question but mostly there was no question—this is what I was going to do.

Q: And were your parents supportive of that? Some parents like this idea and some people think, my god, this poor child is going to starve to death.

Lerman: In my case, it's an irrelevant question. My mother died when she was young and when I was young and my father was—my family history is a very long, complicated and—I've written about my family history. I've talked about it publicly. It's a long, psychological discussion that I could step outside and say, coming from a complicated family and a family with a very difficult history, I'm sure that influenced me in many, many, many ways. But it influenced, probably, the things I write about and the way I write, rather than my choice.

Q: I laughed when I read in *Literary Kicks* that you didn't feel qualified for your first job as a sweeper in a harpsichord factory. What made you think you could do your first job at Carnegie [Corporation of New York] when you walked in?

Lerman: When I came to work here, I was asked two questions that I remember. One was, “Can you work for a difficult person?” And I said, “Oh yes.” And the other question was, “What qualifies you to be an editorial assistant?”—or whatever was the exact title of the job but I was essentially an editorial assistant. I said, well, I was just nominated for a National Book Award.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: And so they said okay.

Q: [Laughs] That solves that question, I see—

Lerman: Yes, basically, they said you can have the job.

Q: [Laughs] I see, well, I see. But, if I read between the lines there, you have a way with words but you have a lot less formal training than other people who were applying for the job. And that didn't matter to Carnegie?

Lerman: I guess at that time it didn't, and it didn't matter to the person who became my boss, Avery [B.] Russell. What she was interested in, I guess, was my editorial skills or my writing skills and she was a very good mentor, actually, in that area. And they were less concerned, I think, in those days, with formal degrees and advanced degrees if you were coming in at a relatively low-level position. I think today, I really don't know but I think today at Carnegie

Corporation, to be even an administrative assistant, I think they require some kind of advanced degree or formal training. It was very different then. You're talking back in the '70s, right?

Q: Ancient history, yes? [Laughs]

Lerman: Yes.

Q: Well—yes, thirty-five years ago. [Laughs]

Lerman: Yes.

Q: [Laughs] I keep reminding myself. What were your preconceptions of—I mean, it's not a behemoth in terms of funding but it was more important in 1977 than it is now, in terms of the map, and it always had an aura about it. But what were your preconceptions walking in the door, for either the interview or the first or second day of the job?

Lerman: I was looking for a job.

Q: Yes.

Lerman: I had no preconceptions. I needed a job. And in those days, you went to an employment agency, you sat down next to a woman—it was always a woman—who had a box of index cards and you told her what you could do you. You took a typing test and she sent you places. And this

is one of the places she sent me. It was a different floor, I think it was the thirty-eighth floor. I had worked previously for a nonprofit organization and so I guess it was, “Oh, you worked for a nonprofit organization. Here is a nonprofit organization looking for a person to work here.” I'm sure I had no idea what a foundation was.

Q: [Laughs] This may sound like a strange question. I'll explain why in a minute. When did you learn to type or where did you learn to type?

Lerman: In high school. I went to high school in the years when girls took commercial courses because you were going to be a secretary. So I learned to type in high school.

Q: The reason I asked that story is I actually went to a Jesuit prep school and I had to learn to type when I was a freshman. And I still am the best typist, actually, in my office, and of course I make my living by writing, so it's ironic. And a dear friend of mine, Dame Margaret—Margaret Joan Anstee—grew up in a very simple family and she wanted to call her autobiography *Why I Never Learned to Type*. Because her mother, who was a charwoman, said, “You will never be in front of a machine.” So it's just interesting how these things go. I'd like to come back to the nuts and bolts of the job in a minute but I was sort of curious why you left in 1985.

Lerman: Oh, I was probably bored. I was mostly writing grant descriptions for the annual report and I was just getting tired of it. I thought that what I was going to do was get a job doing something that had nothing to do with writing, so that I could write, spend more time myself writing. And in those days, I wasn't concerned about—I still am not, at the end of my career, I’m

not as concerned as I should have been about this part of my life as a career. I never was that concerned about having a professional career because I had another life in mind, a life as a writer. So it wasn't a decision about getting a better job or moving up or anything like that. It was just, I don't want to do this anymore. I'll go do something else. And you didn't have to worry in those days. Looking for a job was not an issue.

Q: Yes. That's right. [Laughs]

Lerman: There were jobs.

Q: [Laughs] There were jobs, yes. And then, what lured you back in 1999?

Lerman: It was just a coincidence. I saw that my former boss—that Avery was leaving. And I had been working for the American Lung Association for a very long time. A lot of things were changing in my life, and I thought it might be interesting to come back here and do my ex-boss's job, which, at that point, I thought I could do. I had been doing publications production for, at that point, a very long time. And so it just seemed like it would be a good fit.

Q: Actually, in a couple of interviews with other people, I've always asked [laughs] what do you think makes good preparation or good training for foundation work? And the answer usually is "Lord knows," or something like that. [Laughs] Do you have a better reply to that? I mean, what—what kinds of—

Lerman: No, because the job that I do could be done in any—I think probably primarily in a nonprofit environment—but could be done at any nonprofit organization. It could also be done, I think, at any commercial organization, because, essentially, what I'm doing is producing publications. So the task is to find the right subject, to find the right writer, to find the right designer, to go through the technical aspects of the writing and production. So it's not a job that—it's a job that's probably shaped by the atmosphere, in that the choice of subjects and the way we handle them, et cetera et cetera—but most of the technical aspects of the job, you could take it and put it anywhere else. I'm an editor. I produce publications. I write with people. So I don't think that it's specific to the foundation. There are specific things about Carnegie Corporation, I guess, that shape the way we do things but the job could be done elsewhere.

Q: But certainly the content, it is meaningful.

Lerman: Oh, yes.

Q: I mean, you don't write pulp fiction. You write poetry and I presume [laughs] writing about what Carnegie does, whether it's libraries or Africa or the former Soviet Union or whatever, is different, no?

Lerman: Well, let me say that I am extremely respectful of this organization and understand its place in history and I think it's done incredibly important work. That said, again, when you're an editor or a writer, the task is to tell the story. It's the same thing—that's one of the reasons we hire a lot of journalists, because journalists are—that's what they do, they tell stories. So the

stories that we tell are in the context of Carnegie Corporation, with respect for Carnegie Corporation, its history and its specifics. But it's still—what I do, I think you could ask someone at the *New York Times* or at some small nonprofit or at Goldman Sachs—if there's someone in my position producing books and reports and magazines, they'd say the same thing. I have an obligation to my organization to tell the stories it wants told, in the way it wants them told, in league, in line, with the mission of the organization and to serve the goals of the organization.

Q: We can move on to the nuts and bolts of various jobs. Your job—career—is a way to pay the bills, et cetera, to support your avocation, vocation, however you want to describe it. Lots of people have a real trouble making peace with that notion. I actually [laughs]—one the other things in that *Literary Kicks* that I found funny was, at some moment, [quotes from essay] "What I really had going for me was my working-class ethic," you know. And I actually have a sign on my office, because I have graduate students, which was the only thing I took from—actually Greg [Vartan Gregorian]'s predecessor at Brown, Howard [R.] Swearer, had a sign, and when he died it was the only thing I wanted to take, which was a European traffic sign. And it says, "No" but it's got "whining" on it. And so I have that right in the middle of my desk every time a graduate student comes in to talk about a dissertation. So you've made peace with this notion. Would you have any advice for other aspiring poets, writers, whatever, who have to do something else to make a living?

Lerman: I've been very lucky in my life in that I never planned the career that I was going to make a living at. Never planned it, it just happened. And I am lucky that the way it happened sent me into the area of books and writing and editing and book production and computer-aided

design and all of that at a—you have to remember that I started in book production before there were computers. And so I learned all of that from scratch. So I was lucky in that it was interesting. I was always learning something new. The editing skills that I learned in my job—I didn't realize it but—were very, very useful to me in my life as a writer. So I never am very good at giving people advice, because that means you have to plan something and I never planned anything. It just—something was watching over me, something sent me the right way. And I am lucky in that my professional path dovetailed, in a way, with my other life as a writer and they have informed each other and helped each other. So I don't actually look at my professional life as just a way to make a living, because it has helped me in my life as a writer.

Q: So, different from waiting tables—

Lerman: Yes.

Q: —or what some of my friends used to do.

Lerman: Yes. The two things have always supported each other.

Q: In this large oral history I did of the foundation of the United Nations [United Nations Foundation], actually the third chapter was called "Serendipity" because actually that same kind of story seemed to apply to, I'm going to say, three out of four people. “I was in a drunken stupor after some party and I stumbled on a board and there was an ad for doing a job in Uganda and I took it.” I mean, it was really that—and I think that there may be guardian angels but I think also

probably—some of us are lucky but I think one takes advantage of things and follows one's nose and it ends up working out. I think most of us are sort of existentially ridiculous as planners. I often think it seems to bounce from one thing to another.

Lerman: Well, I think, also, it's your general skills. You can fall into something and if you can't do it, you can't do it. So you can fall into something that you probably fell into anyway because your radar was going that way, because that's what your mindset is and your skills are and you tend to be good at it. And, being human, if you're good at something and you're damaged—and we're all damaged. So we all have the receptors that say, oh, tell me I'm good. Make me feel better—so, if you're good at something and people say, you're good at this, you want more. So you keep doing this stuff.

Q: [Laughs] Yes. There you are. I wonder if we could sort of go back and forth for a minute to characterize the beginning or the middle of the first period you were here, under the [Alan J.] Pifer presidency, and now, toward the end of Gregorian's time. How would you describe the working cultures of the two places? It seems to me institutions oftentimes reflect the person at the top's style, demeanor, et cetera. Could you characterize those two periods in any meaningful way?

Lerman: It's difficult for me because when I was here when I was younger, I mean, I really was a kid. I was in my twenties—until—maybe twenty-five to my early thirties and I was in a very junior position. And so what I did was I sat in an office and I did what I was told to do. So, I mean, I saw it from below. It seemed—it was a lovely place. I mean, everyone was very nice.

You did feel a sense of, you were part of an organization that cared about you. Even though I didn't understand how to use the benefits or what they meant—

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: —and you don't need very much health insurance when you're twenty-five if you're lucky—I understood that we were getting very good benefits. And the hours were very normal. I never had to work late. But again, I was in a very junior position. So it seemed to me, though, that there was a formality about the organization. The president—who I now know more about because, of course, I've written and read so much about him, Alan Pifer—was a distant figure. Very nice whenever I had to interact with him, but, you know, to me distant, the way any president of an organization would be to a young, junior person. So, I mean, the only way I could characterize the Carnegie Corporation then was it seemed to me a formal place. And I understood that, and I understood that I should respect that. And I understood that whatever my life was outside of that, when I walked in here I was supposed to be the kind of person that I was supposed to be to do my job here, and I enthusiastically agreed with that. And as long as I kept my part of the bargain, they kept their part of the bargain with me. It was a very good place to work.

And now, of course, I'm in a different position. And again, it's hard for me because my professional life here, I think, is somewhat different than other people's, because I'm not in the program area. I'm not making or trying to influence any direction of the foundation. My job is to disseminate information about the foundation. It's still an extraordinarily wonderful place to

work for someone like me because there is a great deal of respect for what your abilities are. Nobody tries to change what you do. I've never been told you can't do this, you can't do that. I've always felt that there was a great deal of respect for my skills, my knowledge, my talent. So Carnegie seems to me to have—in my younger years and later—retained its ability to nourish people. To nourish both academics and people of an artistic bent. I do remember a couple of years ago—it may not be so now, I really don't know—but a couple of years ago somebody saying, "My goodness, we have a lot of writers, opera singers, piano players, actors and actresses working here in all the ranks." And at the time, that was true and I thought that that is something about Carnegie Corporation. Whatever life you have outside, it lets you have. I mean, I've often thought—one of the reasons I've tried very hard to keep my writing life separate from my life at Carnegie Corporation is that my life as a writer has gone off into areas that have nothing to do with Carnegie Corporation and that I could see Carnegie Corporation, as some formal, important organization, frowning upon. But nobody has ever done that. The only thing that's ever happened is I have been congratulated for being a successful—minorly successful—artist of one kind or another. So it seems to me a very nurturing organization.

Q: Very nice. Well, let's go back to 1977. [Laughs] That first question you were asked—why was Avery Russell impossible?

Lerman: I wouldn't say—

Q: Well, why did other people think she was impossible? [Laughs]

Lerman: I would never say that she was impossible. Avery had the temperament of a writer, which is what I was used to. I'd been around a lot of—again, I've written and talked publicly about this—both good and bad influences on me. I was around a lot of very successful, very famous writers. Again, simply by serendipity. And I understood people who were temperamental. And Avery was temperamental—which I don't mean in any prejudicial way. I think Avery was the epitome of—was it Dorothy Parker's line? "I hated writing but I loved having written." So I think she is one of those people for whom writing is difficult. It was hard for me to understand, I guess a little bit, because I'm not that way, but I understood that for a lot of people, the act of writing was difficult, scary, whatever it was. So people had chosen or been driven to a profession that they had to wrestle with a lot, and she had to wrestle with what her job was. And her job, as I understood it, a lot of it had to do with writing for Alan Pifer at the time. She was always—she wrote his—or worked with him, I shouldn't say she wrote them. But she worked with him in writing his essays in the annual report, which they did every year, and I would imagine other things, I really don't remember. So, you know, she was temperamental. And again, I was young. I came from a working-class background. I expected the person you worked for to be difficult.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: I mean, she could've been the loveliest woman in the world and I would have expected her to be difficult. Because the boss was difficult. That's what my father said, so I assumed that was true.

Q: [Laughs] That was the truth. You used a very nice term earlier to describe her, namely, a mentor.

Lerman: Yes.

Q: In what ways was she a good mentor for you?

Lerman: She was a fabulous mentor, in terms of teaching me to be an editor, because we used to write the agenda items, I think they were called then, for the annual report, and they were descriptions of the grants. She had rules. And the rules were—and I may get this wrong—they couldn't be more than fifteen lines and you couldn't use the same word twice in a paragraph. So everything that we fund is a project. How do you say project after you've used the word "project"? So I would have to think of very interesting and convoluted and different ways of saying what things were. So it made me search through language a lot, to be precise, to be inventive. And she literally—it was here that I learned how to use proofreaders' marks, because Avery did, so I went to the dictionary, which had a very helpful list of proofreaders' marks. I learned to use more—I knew about the *Chicago Manual of Style* but she insisted that it be used. And so I used it. It was very, very helpful. So it was her insistence on being precise, and literally the technical aspects of editing. Literally how to sit down and do it on a piece of paper. Now, you would use Track Changes in Microsoft Word. But I learned to mark up copy in the old way. And it was very helpful for me, because it made you really look at a piece of paper and look at those words on the paper. And each word was a character in the play and it had its role to play and you

couldn't fudge anything with her. You couldn't be mushy about any of this. And I probably resented it when I was doing it, but I now understand how critically important it was.

Q: How did—somebody whose name doesn't mean much to me but I've seen in the files—Barbara [D.] Finberg fit into this? Was she the person who supervised publications?

Lerman: No, Barbara Finberg was, if I remember correctly, something like the executive vice president.

Q: Yes, that's it.

Lerman: So she was sort of the second-in-command.

Q: Oh, I see.

Lerman: So I guess everybody reported to her in one way or another but I really don't know that much about—

Q: Oh, I see.

Lerman: —the interactions at the higher levels.

Q: The reason I ask, [laughs] I was going through an interview with Susan [R.] King who said, well, [quotes from interview] "Eleanor worked here as a young person with Avery"—and then she goes on—"and when people like Barbara Finberg were ruling empresses in the foundation." So I [laughs] thought that was an interesting image. But then she goes on to say that—I think what she was referring to, and I guess it's not Finberg, it must be back to Avery Russell—a keen awareness of the kind of precision and detail and editing perfection that was needed here.

[INTERRUPTION]

Lerman: Anyway, it is my recollection and/or my understanding that Barbara was also very insistent on precision. There were all these formal things that happened. There were something called chrons, which I guess is chronology or something. Books were sent around with onionskin copies of things, correspondence, and people were constantly editing and re-editing—nothing went out of here without ten people looking at it. There was an enormous respect and consideration for things being grammatically correct, punctuated properly, and that the English language be used in all its precise, pristine perfection. And I felt like, yes ma'am, if that's what you want, that's what we're going to do. So that may be what Susan and others were referring to. I think that was the culture, yes. But that was also a culture pre-computers and the internet, so that's a whole other discussion about whether those kind of standards have changed. I wouldn't say changed for the worse or the better, just changed. But in those days, those were the standards.

Q: Actually, could we stay with—that was actually going to be my next—I wanted to do a kind of a thirty-five years ago [laughs] and today. That is, the conception of—what passes muster? [Laughs] What's high-quality prose and editing, and what does communications mean, then and now? So could we continue? How would you characterize those two periods?

Lerman: Are you talking about specifically at Carnegie Corporation or in the world?

Q: At Carnegie. Yes.

Lerman: Well, I think our publications—there is still the same deep reverence and respect for precision in describing ideas. This organization is now under the presidency of an historian, a man who is himself an excellent writer, and I would expect of us nothing less than the same kind of precision here. It's a whole other discussion about the world in general, but here, in terms of our publications and our communications, we still take it all very, very, very seriously. In particular, I remember a discussion with Susan, in fact, early in our collaboration when I came to work for her, about footnotes. And Susan came from the world of journalism and television and I have a brother who comes from the same world, so I'm familiar with it. And we were discussing why we needed so many footnotes in something. And I said, "Well then, one of the things that happens in this world of academic writing is that people actually do read the footnotes. And twenty years later you'll get a letter from someone saying, 'I see on page 412 in footnote 1196, you said X. I have now discovered it's Y and why did you think it was X?'" I said, "So you have to be very precise because there are whole worlds of people who actually take all this very, very, very seriously. And if you don't do it perfectly and you don't have all the backup information of

where you got this statistic and this fact, you will start getting letters from people." And I said, "Look at the back of the *New York Review of Books*. That the world that we're getting into once we're working in this kind of milieu, so we have to be very careful and very precise."

Q: And what did she say?

Lerman: Okay. She said, "I get it."

Q: [Laughs] I get it. But it just seems so stereotypical of—journalists do this and academics do that. But in your view, that was actually quite accurate.

Lerman: Yes, and it was terrific that she understood it. No, I mean journalists certainly have to check facts. But there's a difference. If you're talking about television journalism, it's different because things tend to be said and then—well, there was a time when things tended to be said and then you passed by. Now it's different, of course, because you've got this whole twenty-four-hour news cycle which we talk about a lot. Journalists have to be precise and I know that if you're a good journalist you're dedicated to being precise. But there's a difference between that kind of writing and the kind of academic writing that's done here, which is often very detailed, full of statistics and full of historical references, and you can't be even perceived as making this up. You have to have backup for where this information came from. You have to document the source of your ideas and conclusions.

Q: And, maybe it seems like a strange question, I mean—this costs money. Has anyone ever said, "Your preoccupation with footnotes, commas, glossy covers, photos, statistics, et cetera, you know—who cares? Why does it matter?" Gregorian being a historian is one thing, but I'm just wondering whether board members or anyone else would have ever complained about that kind of emphasis.

Lerman: Not to my knowledge. There is, again, a great respect here for history, for writing, for ideas. This organization, I think, prides itself on being dedicated to excellent scholarship and because it is dedicated to that, it's dedicated to that in all aspects of its work. I've never—other than regular budgetary questions about why does something cost this much or that much, nobody has ever said you can't do it this way or that way because it's going to cost this or that.

Q: Interesting. Well, you got bored. You left. But I presume some of the things that happened during that ten or twelve—twelve-year period between '87 and '99 at the American Lung Association, you took things from here to there. What was it that you picked up there that was important when you came back?

Lerman: All the computer-related, technical aspects of book, magazine, and article production. It was at the American Lung Association—again, I was very lucky. I got an extraordinary education in computer-aided book production and computer-aided design. I was introduced to it from its very, very beginnings. And I remember having a conversation with an assistant, someone I worked with. We used to—everything was done with mechanicals when you produced books. You cut up pieces of copy and you pasted them together. And the first time we

were ever given a—two of us, one computer, one printer, and the printer had two fonts. It had Times Roman and Helvetica. That's all it had. It was as big as an oven. It had on it [Adobe] PageMaker 1.0, the first program ever created to make books and magazines. So two women, one computer, one printer, one mouse—so we're holding hands playing with the mouse.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: Like everyone in a job at work who's given a new thing, we're grumbling about it. Why do we have to learn this? This'll never last, blah blah blah blah blah.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: And I remember thinking about it, thinking about it, and coming to work one day and saying, "You know what? We better learn this because this is how it's going to be. I can see. This is how it's going to be, so we better stop grumbling and learn it." And so we decided we would learn it. So we asked for another one so there could be two mice and two computers, and we did, we learned. And that's what I think I brought back here, was the idea that if you were going to work—if you were going to produce books and magazines in print, you had to make the full-circle connection between also doing it electronically. Things had to be online. There had to be a website. The whole spectrum of books don't exist just on paper anymore. They exist on lots of platforms and lots of media, and we have to be prepared to produce publications and everything else in all media, in all worlds, electronically, forever. The same—the way copyright clauses

now say, we're copywriting it in this medium, that medium and in anything that's ever invented. So that's what I learned at the American Lung Association.

Q: I think there are lots of pluses to that. Do you see any negatives? You alluded to quality earlier. Either at Carnegie or in the world at large, with this move, basically, to electronically available platforms for virtually everything,

Lerman: No.

Q: No.

Lerman: The world changes. I've had this discussion with publishers, for example, and other writers that—people bemoan the fact that paper books may be on their way out. Well, that's another discussion. Maybe they are, maybe they aren't. But it doesn't matter. If you're an artist or a writer or an editor or a journalist or whatever you are, the world changes. And it's the same thing as back at the American Lung Association. The two of us looking at the computer going, "I don't like it. I want to keep doing it the way I used to do it." Well, you can't. The world changes and you have to learn to do things new ways and to adjust to them. And people who are successful do. If you sit in your room and you say, "I don't like it. I won't do it. I think it's too bad, language is changing" and all that—you can complain, but you're not going to get anywhere.

Q: Was there any difference in trying to do what you do for—it seems to me that nonprofits, since I've worked for a lot of them, have different personalities. They certainly have different audiences. And I presume the people you were trying to reach at an outreach group like the American Lung Association were quite different from the ones here. Did this influence the way you approach your job or is it still—technically—

Lerman: Well, I mean, the technical aspects are the same. In any project, you ask yourself, who is my audience? So you design things differently, you might write things differently, you might disseminate them differently, depending on who you're trying to reach. But the underpinnings are always the same. The quality is the same, the issues about precision and accuracy and being helpful, if that's what your goal is to—at the American Lung Association, obviously, there was much more of a bent toward—the information was meant to be specifically helpful to people because it was health information, public health information. So you bear in mind what your goal is and what your mission is, but the underpinnings of quality are always the same.

Q: I'm always interested in the influences of the bigger world on the performance or lack of performance or possibilities for institutions. When you [laughs] left Carnegie, it was the end of the [President Ronald W.] Reagan era, and you're back and it's a totally different period with the end of [President William “Bill” J.] Clinton. Did this influence conversations in the coffee shop or what kinds of things seemed possible, imaginable, and did it influence the culture, to use an overworked term, of this corporation?

Lerman: I'm not sure I understand. Are you asking if the political atmosphere in the world—

Q: Yes. In other words, the outside political atmosphere had an influence on the way programming was done, conversations were held, what kinds of things were imaginable, et cetera. Since we've fast forwarded over a decade in a totally different political period, was it different when you arrived back here?

Q: Without having any real knowledge of how those kinds of decisions are made here, I can only tell you that it has always seemed to me, in retrospect and in what I see currently in this organization, that Carnegie Corporation has always worked with a moral objective. And that was exactly—what is given to the organization is the mission, the advancement and dissemination of knowledge and understanding. And I think, because that's been its mission, whatever—people have written all kinds of stuff about what the Corporation's done and for political reasons, maybe it did this, maybe it did that. And I can't speak to that because I wasn't involved in any of it. But just as someone who's handled its communications in one way or another, it has always seemed to me that it has followed the star that Andrew Carnegie set upon the heavens for it, which is: disseminate information. Find good ideas. Find worthwhile scholarship and let people know about it. So whatever steps, missteps, sidesteps this organization has taken to accommodate itself to or not accommodate itself to the wider political atmosphere, I haven't seen them. And I have never personally experienced any kind of censorship—good, bad, indifferent—about, we'll do it this way or that way because of the way the world is.

Q: So it influences projects or programs, because new needs pop up, but it doesn't influence the way the Corporation proceeds.

Lerman: I would say that's probably true.

Q: You mentioned dear Andrew. How much—I guess as somebody who walks in occasionally to the twenty-sixth floor, I'm struck at how many pictures there are of him, here, there and elsewhere, on every cover, et cetera. What does this mean for branding? I presume this has to do something with what we're trying to communicate. Is this part of it?

Lerman: Well, I think there are a couple of answers to that, and that is, one, that under Vartan Gregorian, as a historian, I think that he has created a culture of really remembering and being respectful of this extraordinary man and the legacy that he left behind. I think Vartan says in his autobiography, *The Road To Home*, that he sits under Andrew Carnegie's portrait every day and is reminded that he better be doing the job that Andrew Carnegie would have wanted him to do. I think that, politically, Susan King said—and she was right—that the fact that the organization, the foundation, does follow the mission that was set forth by Andrew Carnegie is politically important for us. It's a political plus for us, in that so many foundations are attacked for "Well, you know, the guy who founded this organization would be rolling over in his grave if he knew you were funding X, Y, and Z. Because he was very conservative and now you're being very liberal." I think the Ford Foundation often suffers from that.

Q: Yes, they certainly do. I grew up in Detroit, so that's—[laughs]

Lerman: Yes. But Carnegie Corporation never has and never will because I think people feel and I think they're right, that—with some adjustments, obviously, of a man living in the early 1900s, the late 1800s—if Andrew Carnegie somehow materialized, he would basically be pleased with the things that we support. Because we have tried to, I think, over the years, again, follow the mission he set for the organization, which is, do good things. Make the world a better place.

Q: Yes. So that has certainly—I'm trying to—my own historical memory here [laughs]—whether this was not nearly the case under [David A.] Hamburg. I mean, you arrived right at the transition between the two. I mean, did the covers of the annual reports, et cetera, have as many references to him [Andrew Carnegie]? Speeches?

Lerman: Again, I can't really speak about the David Hamburg years because I wasn't here, but I don't think so. And that doesn't mean that Andrew Carnegie was still not influencing the work. Just because his picture wasn't on everything doesn't mean the organization still wasn't following the mandate.

Q: I was just looking at this job description for Susan King and the first line talks about the stewardship of the brand. But it's not spelled—

Lerman: Oh is that the new one?

Q: Yes. And so I just wondered the extent to which that brand is [laughs] is well-known.

Lerman: Well, that's new language. Again, as the world changes, that's the word that everyone uses now, is “brand.” It'll be something else in twenty years.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: So right now you need to be a steward of the brand.

Q: But it's genuine and it's useful.

Lerman: It is genuine. There is a genuine—I keep using the same word but it's true—a genuine respect for the fact that this was an individual, Andrew Carnegie, who had an idea about what he was going to do with his wealth, that he did something quite revolutionary with it, which is give it away. We've met his descendants, who are not wealthy people, unlike the [Henry and Edsel B.] Fords and the [John D.] Rockefellers and the [Andrew W.] Mellons. And so, if you think about it, you do understand that there is a legacy here that was left by a remarkable individual and you have a responsibility to do your best to carry it forward.

Q: When you returned, what recollection do you have of the McKinsey [& Company] report which was done right after Gregorian came? Everyone tends to—has to always have some outside consultants come in and tell you what's good, bad or indifferent. I wonder what you recall from that report and what you think its ultimate impact was?

Lerman: Well, I haven't read it in a long time but I think what, just from my own perspective, its impact from my little part of the world was that we had to do more public outreach. And so I think that was one of the reasons that someone like Susan King was hired, because she was different than Avery in that Avery was, I think, primarily a communications person and her idea was to run an excellent publications program, which she did, and to write with and for Dr. Hamburg and Alan Pifer. But Susan came more from, of course, a journalistic background. And since she was in television and she'd been in government, she understood a great deal about outreach and outward communications and the new world of communications. And so, I think the McKinsey report, if I recall, did—it may not have suggested those specific parameters but it suggested that someone with Susan's qualifications be put in charge of a much more robust communications program. So I think that was a major influence.

Q: And, in general, that was—I'm speaking of Susan King—a was a sensible experiment that paid off.

Lerman: Yes.

Q: I think that one is looking now for a clone of Susan King for the next [laughs]—I'm being a little facetious. But someone who has a similar—I would say an awareness of public relations in a way that those of us who are mired in written stuff may not.

Lerman: Well, but there is yet another—again, the world changes. There is yet another dimension. I think the new person—Susan understood and really pushed the whole idea of us

going further and further into online communications and social media and everything. She was very open to that and very forceful about it. Even what she didn't specifically know herself, she knew we had to find out about. But I think that the new person will have to be even more of an expert, themselves, in those areas. It can't just be, we will hire people or find out. At this point, it has to be someone who says, “I've done it. I can do it. I can tell you what to do myself.”

Q: In some of the interviews, there was the notion—and maybe it's because he is an historian—that Greg was slow to start. That he took—he was very deliberate about his tenure. Is that correct?

Lerman: Well, again, it's not something that I can speak about because I—Susan would have been more in contact with him in the early years. I ended up working with him, writing with him, later. I think, in retrospect, I have heard a lot of people say that. Perhaps it's true but I couldn't tell you specifically. In my early years here, under Gregorian, I was primarily concerned with doing my job and setting up all the publications that we’d set up. So I really don't know.

Q: Well, you mentioned that you've worked with him more recently. What's it like working for him? The specifics? I can tell my own stories but I'd like you to tell yours. [Laughs]

Lerman: Well again, I'm in a very, I think, unique position in that—I'm a good ghostwriter. I've written—again, serendipity. My brother, for many years, was the producer of *America's Most Wanted.* And he wrote a lot of—well, he wrote two books and a lot of other things for John [E.]

Walsh. The kind of stuff that's "by John Walsh with Philip Lerman." So I was Philip Lerman's ghostwriter.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: So I learned to write like John Walsh. And so when it came to working with Vartan on writing pieces, I already sort of knew how to do that. And I knew how to be—let me say that my one gift in this area is to be totally and completely selfless about it. I do understand the role of the assistant writer, and that is: it has nothing whatsoever to do with anything I think, my opinions, my feelings about anything. I am here to be the tool of the real writer. And Vartan is the smartest human being I have ever met and I figured that out very quickly. And I figured out that this was a man who could think rings around anybody, and my job was just to find ways to take his thoughts and organize them. And so, understanding that, I think it's been wonderful for me because I'm exposed to, as I said, a brilliant human being who thinks about things that I would never think about, that I thought I had no interest in, like the machinations of higher education. And again, it's been very good for me as a writer because having to write with him about things that I don't know much about, or didn't when I started, has taught me again the precision of language and ideas and understanding ideas and being able to write about them.

Q: Actually [laughs]—that's interesting. I'm going to skip ahead here a little bit—is Greg always clear about what it is he really is trying to do or trying to say?

Lerman: Well—

Q: I'm just going to give you a quote from Susan King, who said that she sometimes went in, she had no idea what he was talking about, and that ultimately, she became a kind of a—she did the interpretation. Kind of, you're in your booth and sort of trying to translate these rather macro and roaming thoughts into something far more precise. And she felt that in fact, oftentimes Carnegie policy was what publications [laughs] came up with, more than what he said.

Lerman: I think that people misunderstand him in—people who are in a position where they have to in some way communicate his ideas—that they don't understand that what he does is he thinks out loud and that he may say something twelve different ways. What I've learned—again, it's a question of being selfless, I think. If you understand how a person thinks and works, you take what they say, you organize it, you write it down, and you give it back to them. And then they change it. And Vartan changes things a lot. We may go through many, many, many, many drafts of things. I think for some people that's frustrating. For me, it's not, because I am a writer. I work one way, he works a different way, but I understand how he works. And understanding how he works, I'm fine with it. So I think what people say they think of as confusing is probably because they don't understand he is saying the same thing in many different ways, and they're not giving him the space he needs to refine what he wants to say. It's just that he outthinks everybody and his mind is going further, faster than yours is. And he's making connections about ideas that you may not follow. And so you just have to try and follow where he's going.

Q: Interesting. Since I've been in this business for some time—that is, in the business of having my hands out to people to try to help me do research I'd like to do—I'm curious about—and

since this project is about the Gregorian years—whether you think or you've seen any concrete indications that somebody like Gregorian, who for many years was a supplicant, or certainly on the other side of the table from people—has this ever influenced the way he tries to make the corporation behave or perform, or its demeanor toward supplicants? [Laughs]

Lerman: I think the only way I can answer that is that I've seen him really push the organization towards collaborating with other organizations in a way that maybe it didn't before. And I think that he probably does that because it's a way of consolidating and expanding how much money is available for the project. So having been on both sides, as the fundraiser and the person controlling the purse strings, I think that's one of the novel ideas he brought to the whole idea of being a philanthropist, is the idea that you don't have to just do it yourself, meaning just your organization. You go find partners.

Q: Yes. Certainly in looking at the publications over the years and his speeches, the word "partnership" certainly appears with some frequency. And actually, I hadn't thought of tying it to his former role. One of the things that he did do, and I wonder what your take is on this as an individual, a writer—you're an individual, as opposed to an entity—there are very few foundations that actually provide money to individuals. It's always to an institution. This happens to be one of them. How did that Carnegie Scholar[s Program] thing get launched and what were the internal conversations around it?

Lerman: I can't answer that because I don't know. I wasn't involved in it at all.

Q: In communicating about it?

Lerman: Well, that's different. I mean, yes, we spent a lot of time communicating about the importance of scholarship, in particular and in general—individual scholarship in particular and scholarship in general—and it was just seen as part of the Carnegie tradition, that scholarship, whether by an individual or sponsored by an organization, is always a good thing. And as times change, there may be more of an emphasis on individuals, more of an emphasis on institutions. I think in the—I don't remember under whose presidency, it may have been [John W.] Gardner—there was a big emphasis on travel grants to people. There was also an emphasis on travel grants for the staff, the Carnegie Corporation staff. If you had worked here for X amount of years—I don't remember, ten or twenty—one of the things they did, I believe, was they gave you the money to go on a trip because they felt that, you know, even quote-unquote "secretaries" should be exposed to the world and should better themselves and get more of an education. So there has always, here, been that culture of "Knowledge is good." It may be supported and interpreted in different ways, as I said, sometimes through individuals and sometimes through institutions, because of the president of the organization or the program officers or the structure. But the basic idea of supporting scholarship, I think, has always been the same.

Q: As someone who sees most grants going to institutions, I'm rather intrigued by this one because other than [the John D. and Catherine T.] MacArthur [Foundation], which gives money to [laughs] people who haven't asked, and the U.S. Institute of Peace, which hands out individual fellowships, almost everything goes to institutions. And so an individual, a free-standing individual, always needs to associate him- or herself with an institution, so I just find this as an

interesting experiment. You've been here for a couple periods of time. What's your impression of the quality of the staff—the people who run programs or do anything around here? What's your—in terms of other places you've worked or other foundations, how would you characterize it?

Lerman: I mean, it's very personal, and all I can say is that everyone here seems to me very dedicated, very serious about their work, very knowledgeable about what they're doing and nobody's trying—that I don't think anybody in the program staff here sees this as, this is just my job. I think this is their life. They really believe in what they're doing and they are very serious about and care about it deeply. And I can't speak about that much when I was younger, again, because I was in a very junior position and I would not have been in a position to really know how people felt about their jobs. And there was a formality about interactions then. But my interactions now with people are somewhat deeper and I have nothing but the greatest admiration for how seriously dedicated they are to what they do.

Q: Do people—I guess I should tread softly here—do people stay too long in the corporation?

Lerman: I couldn't answer that. I grew up in a tradition where people got jobs and stayed there for their whole life, whether you were a clothing cutter or you were a teacher or in what, to me, would have been the lofty position of professor. So it's difficult to ask someone of my age, with my class and cultural background, if anyone ever stays too long at a job, because I come from a tradition where even the highest job, you get a job, you do your best at the job, the company

respects you, takes care of you. So I, actually, would bristle at the idea that anybody could tell anybody they had stayed too long at a job that they were doing well at.

Q: Well, I guess my thought here is that turnover in and of itself is probably a good idea and—

Lerman: I'm sorry, what did you say? The turn—

Lerman: —the turnover, the infusion of new people. And I'm also—and this is somebody on the other side—when people stay too long, they tend to actually think that they're more charming and insightful than they are actually. But anyway that's a bit of a [laughs] a personal prejudice.

Lerman: Well, I can see the arguments on both sides, but then it also becomes a kind of socio-political argument about the responsibility of an organization to the individual, as well the individual's responsibility to the organization.

Q: Would you mind if we just paused a minute?

Lerman: No, of course.

Q: And this is a pause!

[END OF SESSION]

3PM | Session 2

Interviewee: Eleanor Lerman | Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: Thomas G. Weiss | Date: June 8, 2012

Q: Tom Weiss and Eleanor Lerman, resumed. Were you here when Susan King came, or did—

Lerman: No.

Q: She hired you?

Lerman: She hired me, yes.

Q: And how was the conversation different in 1977? [Laughs]

Lerman: Well, I think it really hinged on what I had said earlier that—I don't remember specifically, I'll just tell you the basic context was her asking me what I could bring to this, and I said what we need to do is we need to think about publications existing in many more media than just in print. And I think she told me that that's when she understood that I probably was the right person for the job because she knew that—that made sense to her that we needed to move beyond just print publications, and find out how to deal with the burgeoning field of electronic publications.

Q: What was the division of labor? You mentioned before, she had this journalistic approach, and therefore, there were some differences in style, footnotes, et cetera. But was there a division of labor in the office between what she was doing and what you were doing, and which order?

Lerman: Oh, very clearly. I mean, it was her vision, her strategy. We were carrying out her strategies for communications, and I was fine with that. As a matter of fact, I was glad that there was someone who was figuring out the strategy because I've always envisioned myself as the person who gets the instructions and then carries them out. I was in charge of the publications, and it was a very good partnership because I knew that what she did I could not possibly do, and she knew that what I did, she couldn't do, or didn't want to do. And so it worked really, really well. She was the one who set the direction of where we were going, and then I made the publications fulfill the direction that she set out.

Q: [Laughs] Well, what was her vision and strategy? Because as I was looking at her description of that, she said when Gregorian had hired her, he basically said, "Help me shape the national agenda."

Lerman: Yes.

Q: And she said [laughs] when she tells other people that, they kind of laugh as a notion. How would you describe that strategy or vision?

Lerman: Well, she does say that, always says that—that he said, "Help me set the national agenda." And so I think that he was telling her maybe this is a small organization, relatively, now, since it—relatively, its endowment as compared to the Gates Foundation, bigger foundations, is not what it was. But it's a small foundation with a lot of influence, so let's try and influence the national agenda for good. And so I think she was always trying to do that, to give a small organization a large influential voice. And so she was always trying to find ways of doing that. And she also saw herself as, I think, going to Gregorian, trying to understand what he wanted the foundation to communicate and stand for and to try and find ways to communicate that for him.

Q: As a small foundation, what do you think the value added of Carnegie is?

Lerman: Its integrity. Its long history of supporting very important fundamental sociocultural activities in the United States. It did help create public television. It did a lot of work in South Africa. It has always, it seemed to me—it's made many missteps, but it's always been on the side of the angels, in trying to support American higher education. It worked on early childhood education under Dr. Hamburg when that was in vogue. And there were many more theories, I think, than there are now about the influences of very, very young childhood education. So it's always tried to do—I think—it's always tried to the right thing. It hasn't always, but it's tried to.

Q: I read, I think, in two places—and maybe I'm making this up. And it rather goes with your earlier notion of moving in the direction of partnerships that the Carnegie seal of approval is worth something. And therefore, I've seen this notion of incubator, not oxygen tank. Do you

think that's an accurate description, and is that something that you think has appeared in the publications you've been responsible for?

Lerman: Yes, that's Vartan. That's his phrase. As a matter of fact, we had a trivia quiz here among the staff recently—

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: —and that was one of the things: "Who has always said, 'We're an incubator, not an oxygen tank'?" Carnegie's influence is, as I said, its integrity and its being on the side of the angels in terms of supporting knowledge, creation, and scholarship. And under Vartan, I think it has become more of an incubator of ideas, meaning more of the idea of seed money, and supporting an organization—either an organization in its beginnings, or in its beginnings of a project. And then expecting the organization to find a way to carry itself forward.

Q: One of the other things that it seems I've noticed, that I would not necessarily characterize as positive here or anywhere else, is the preoccupation with measurement. That certainly is different now than ever before. Why has that occurred, and what do you think its impact has been?

Lerman: I think there was something along those lines in the McKinsey report about the importance of evaluating what you were doing. So for us, it probably started there. Again, it's back to the world changes. That's what's in vogue now, is that everything has to be measured and

evaluated and prove its worth. Again, I can see arguments on both sides. It is something new, I think, in the foundation. New, meaning over the past decade or so, in the foundation world, of expecting the organizations that you give money to to somehow have measurable results that can be put in [Microsoft] Excel spreadsheets. But it certainly is the culture across all foundations now.

Q: Whereas I mean, I guess I would characterize this—selecting good people and betting on them is probably what one ultimately does and then tries to find a number or two to persuade your board or whatever [laughs] that that's a good idea. I just want to go back to Susan King for a moment before we go to some publications. She throws an awful lot of flowers in your way, saying, "I really wish I could send her my stuff to edit forever!" That's what she said. What were your [laughs] biggest clashes? Where did you—besides the footnotes, what other kinds of things did you not see eye to eye on?

Lerman: Well, actually, the truth is we rarely, rarely did, which is what made it a good partnership. I think that she sometimes felt that I worked too much for Vartan. In her judgment, I think I was not judgmental enough about how he used my time. And that was the only—if we had any kind of disagreements, it was about that, where I would say I don't care. He's a very bright man. I don't feel that I am working too hard, or too much, or too long. If I did, I wouldn't. And I can do everything I have to in my capacity as the editor of the publications and still do this other stuff.

Q: What's happened since she left? I mean, is there a—obviously, when anybody leaves, there's no replacement. So are you just carrying out the old vision and strategy, waiting for something new? Is there a hole in the organizational chart?

Lerman: Well, that sounds sort of negative, and so I wouldn't put it that way. It's a team of very professional people in the public affairs, external affairs, whatever-the-right-name is department. So we're carrying out our functions. We have a communications manager who works very closely with the program staff, and so he is constantly doing outreach, constantly pivoting, constantly working with them to communicate what they're doing. So I think it remains a very rich and robust media operation, press operation. We also—because, especially in the education area, they're working on very, very, very big projects with very big partners, so there are PR [public relations] agencies involved, like Widmeyer [Communications], and big media pushes going on, which George Soule, who is our communications manager, is very deeply involved in. So it's not as if things are on hold. I think what we've just done is instead of following Susan's lead, we're going to the heads of the programs and saying, what do you need, how can we help you? So it's just a more, we have a more diverse set of people whose needs and instructions and ideas we're serving. Because the public affairs department is really supposed to serve the needs of the foundation.

Q: Maybe we can just talk about those nuts and bolts for a minute. Do you go looking for good stories? Or does the program still have to come to you with good stories? I mean, how do you decide what you're going to put on paper, or on the net, or on Twitter, wherever you're putting it these days?

Lerman: It depends on what one means by a story. There's work, there are projects, that the program staff are carrying out that are ongoing that we know are very important. And so there is the effort to do whatever they need us to do in order to communicate those big initiatives. That's one thing. If what we're talking about is stories that are in the magazine, or stories that are in our other publications, it's interactive. We might suggest something, they might suggest something. It's not one or the other.

Q: How do you get enough knowledge about a program? Either to write about it or to know [laughs] that you'd like to do a story?

Lerman: Well, it's not so much about a program as a project.

Q: Or a project, yes.

Lerman: And what I do is I hire a really excellent journalist and tell them to become very knowledgeable about it.

Q: So how do you know you want a journalist to work on African universities versus getting rid of nuclear waste in the former Soviet Union? I mean, how do you make those determinations?

Lerman: Well, the corporation's programs focus on not an infinite variety of things, but on a set and specific universe of ideas, issues, and programs that they're interested in. So we know what

those are. And we will talk to them about, this looks interesting, that looks interesting. Is this ready? Would this make a good story? Do you want us to talk about this? Do you want us to talk about this other thing? So what we need to know is the overall direction and the interest, and then again, you hire a good journalist and set them to find out the deep story.

Q: You ever hire academics to write these?

Lerman: Well, what we have been doing recently is engaging academics to write what I guess I'd call think pieces, about things that they think about anyway. We've had Michael [N.] Barnett write about the Responsibility to Protect [R2P]. We've had James [B.] Steinberg and Francis [J.] Gavin write about the disconnect between policymakers and academics. And we've just hired [Thomas] Tom Graham [Jr.] to write about the US-Russia relationship. So we've been doing more of that, I think, recently. But it's more journalists to do the magazine stories.

Q: I wondered, this range of publications—there are quite a few. I'm never sure what I'm supposed to be carrying back to my office while I'm sitting around in the lobby. I'm wondering whether we could go through them, though, and if you could characterize who do you think the audience for each is, and more or less the content that should go in each of them. Maybe we'll start with the one you just ended up with. Where did—I'm trying to remember where Michael's—I mean, I do [laughs] I work on R2P, and I've actually written a book with Michael on it. And I proposed that he [laughs] actually do it when Stephen J. Del Rosso, Jr. and other people were looking for somebody who knew something. But that's quite a different audience. Where did that appear?

Lerman: In the *Carnegie Reporter*, our magazine.

Q: In the *Reporter*. So what is the—if you were saying, who's the audience for the *Reporter*, and what's in it usually?

Lerman: The *Reporter* comes out only twice a year. I always characterize the target reader as the interested, educated person who's taking a plane to Washington and is trying to pick up a magazine and just doesn't want to read *Wired*, so picks up the *Carnegie Reporter*. It's the interested, educated individual who wants to find out about something that they probably don't think they want to find out about—which is like the Responsibility to Protect, which, you know, how many people even know what that is?

Q: So that's kind of a sophisticated newsletter, then?

Lerman: No.

Q: No?

Lerman: I wouldn't call it a newsletter. Its history is that under Avery Russell there was a publication called the *Carnegie Quarterly*, which obviously came out quarterly and which I worked on with Avery. That it was a newsletter. And its mission, specifically, was to write about grantees. And it was a kind of basic publication in terms of design, in that it was just paper and

text and drawings. I always remember that we hired a guy named Guy [R.] Billout because I liked his name so much, who worked in the—he used to do illustrations for the *New York Times*. Then Avery, I think, stopped doing the Quarterly for a while, and when Susan came on board, her idea—V.G.'s idea about, you know, lift ideas onto the national stage—her idea was to do a magazine. So she hired me, and we talked about what the magazine should be, and what it should look like. And I wanted it to look beautiful. And at that time, I'm going to get this wrong, but I think there were four main program areas. And so we had—international peace and security, education, democracy, and Africa. So, we figured we would do one story about each program area. And that evolved over time, and it became more what was really an interesting and important story for us to do. So I would not characterize it as a newsletter because it's much deeper than that. This is long-form journalism. Six thousand words is a long piece. Five, six thousand words is a long piece.

Q: And so the *Reporter* is a twice-a-year magazine, high-quality, intellectual content. What about the other publications? How would you characterize the [*Carnegie*] *Review*?

Lerman: The *Review* is relatively new. I think we've only been doing it for a couple of years. It's written, I think, almost completely—I can't think of one where we had someone else—by our in-house writer, Karen [B.] Theroux. And that is a review of a program that has come to or is coming to an end. So that is when a program area is sunsetting and we're considering the whole breadth and scope, accomplishments or failures of the whole program area.

Q: And who reads that?

Lerman: We're hoping that the audience is people who are interested in this particular program area, organizations who are working in this area, individuals, and probably philanthropy, people in philanthropy. Because it's also about lessons learned from funding a particular area of work.

Q: They seem to have come back. I remember looking at these earlier on, the Challenge, or Challenge Paper, or Paper Challenge—

Lerman: Yes, the Challenge Papers. There are two other publications, the [*Carnegie*] *Results*, and the Challenge Paper. The Challenge Paper, while the *Review* is retrospective, the Challenge Paper is something that we do occasionally. It doesn't have a schedule. The *Review* actually doesn't either. The *Review* is as necessary, and so is the Challenge Papers. But the Challenge Papers are forward-looking. They're when we're about to open an area of work, and the Challenge Paper is a way of helping to organize the ideas and thinking about the work. And so the Challenge Paper is not so much answering questions as asking them.

Q: And the *Results,* then?

Lerman: The *Results* is a focus on a specific project or grantee, and it's not necessarily something that's finished. But we've done them historically—meaning we've done work that's been over for many, many years—and we've done work that's ongoing. While the *Review* looks at a program area that's closing, the *Results* is the result of a specific project or institution or smaller area of funding.

Q: But the person, or the prospective reader for that, then, is—

Lerman: I'd probably say the same as the *Review*.

Q: Same as—yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. And then the annual report is—all of the above?

Lerman: No. The annual report has actually changed quite a bit. It's not even printed anymore—it just became too expensive to print—and it's not necessary to print it. Because really, what people want from the annual report is to see what we funded. They want to see the list of grants, what the grants were about. Because I think the general function of the annual report is to help people understand whether or not they could get a grant from us. So we don't print it anymore, we put it online. There's a brief description of what the program areas are, the lists of grants, all the information about our finances and investments that are required, legally required. So I see the annual report as a reference document for people who either want to find out about the foundation's finances for whatever reason, or—but mostly for people who are interested in whether or not they can get a grant from us.

Q: Who gets—or how do you decide how to disseminate these things? If it's electronically available, then people can go looking for it. But whom do you target, or how do you target people for the other publications? I guess what are the approximate—I guess you'd call them print runs. We still call them print runs. I mean, how many of these do you put out the door?

Lerman: It's different. For the *Reporter*, it's usually between twenty and twenty-five thousand, and that's partly because—I'm going to forget the number, but maybe about six thousand are actually put at the shuttles, the Delta Shuttle—

Q: I see—[Laughs]

Lerman: —for our specific person going to Washington.

Q: [Laughs] I see. You were really very specific about that audience, yes?

Lerman: Yes, and they all get picked up. We don't get any destroyed or returned, so it's a very useful dissemination point for us. We have a core list of people that we always send these things to, but other than that, there is someone whose job it is to figure out, by working with the program staff and through other means, what's in a particular publication and who would be interested in it and to obtain lists of names of people to send these things to. We also do this: we send out an e-news, where we promote these publications. And we get names of people who were interested by their responses to the e-news. So the *Reporter* is generally between twenty and twenty-five thousand. The results in the *Review* vary more because it's much more targeted to who we think would be interested in it. That's probably between three and seven thousand. And the Challenge Paper could be anywhere. It depends on what the subject is, and who we think we'd want to send it to. And of course, they are all available online.

Q: What's your sense about—I don't know—how many—it's hard to know whether—I guess, you assume if somebody picks up a hard copy at the Delta Shuttle, they'd probably read it. Versus somebody who stumbles into a website. But I mean, is your dissemination electronically two or three times what the hard copies are? Do you have a sense for that?

Lerman: When Susan was here, she tremendously emphasized looking at the statistics from the website. And I will confess that I'm much less interested in it. I don't actually care that much about it. I think she was right. She had a strategy, and she had a responsibility to make sure that what she was doing was reaching people. And I am assuming that the next person who takes that job will feel that same responsibility. I feel less of a responsibility because what I feel my responsibility is is to produce excellent materials, to make these publications as good as they possibly can be and send them out into the world. Which may be influenced by my other life as a writer, because in my other life, I'm also really not that interested in who reads my books, or how far they go.

My brother is also a writer, in addition to being a television producer. We've talked about this a lot, that what writers do is they write things because they're interested in writing them. They do it for themselves. They do it because they're driven to, or because it does something for them. Those receptors that need stuff are excited by when you're writing. And then you write this thing and you send it out into the world, and people start responding to it in very interesting ways and things that you never, never expected. So I think I bring that perspective to my professional life in producing publications, in that my job is to make the content as good as it can be, to make the content fulfill the role it's supposed to fulfill, which in this case is information and knowledge

about a project or an idea or an area of work. And then whatever happens to it happens to it. Hopefully, it reaches somebody who it matters to. I'm lucky. I don't have to prove to anyone. I don't have to personally do those evaluations about who's getting this, who's reading this. I don't have to do that, thank God.

Q: Actually, that's [laughs] what I was going to say. That's an unusual perspective for somebody who writes things because, in fact, either you'd like a royalty or you'd like to know that you've been cited here, there, and elsewhere. And presumably, one is also interested in the quality.

Lerman: I don't care. I mean, the only thing—

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: I've gotten a lot of awards. And that I care about.

Q: Yes.

Lerman: That's very nice. I mean, that's recognition. Otherwise, I really—in my personal life as a writer, I don't care. I don't care about what happens to my work after I leave this particular reality and transition to the next one. I do it because I do it.

Q: What are your interactions with the trustees? Do you—I'm curious as to—are there events organized that you meet with them?

Lerman: I have very—

Q: Little?

Lerman: —little. Yes.

Q: Why is it, you think, that trustees decide to be on the board of trustees? What's your sense about that? It's an impressive group of people. I'm never quite sure how one decides to devote time.

Lerman: I can only assume the best, that they—as we all do here, I hope, have a great deal of respect for the organization and believe as Vartan does that the stewardship of an organization like this is to the benefits of society and its citizens, and that they're doing their civic duty. I mean, they don't get paid, so—

Q: Well, that's what I was trying to figure out. So what the payoff must be, I guess, besides dinner with Gregorian [laughs], there must be some sort of sense that "I'm doing the right thing."

Lerman: I would assume so.

Q: There seemed to be—as I looked through the papers, but if you're not a staff member, it's hard to figure this. It seems to me that—and maybe you've done some of this writing—there seems to

be a lot of tracking of what trustees are doing and communicating what they're doing. Is this driven by Gregorian or is this driven by the trustees that they'd like to know what one another are up to?

Lerman: It's probably not as much as your perception is. Vartan writes a letter before each board meeting, in which he—it's news. But I think it's become more than that. It's become kind of a record—not in any way all-inclusive, by any means. It's very—just sort of eccentric, in a way, by what goes in there. But it's a record of what he's been doing, who he's been meeting with, activities that he's participated in. And as part of that, there's also—we ask the trustees, "Would you like to tell us what you've been doing? Because your fellow trustees might be interested in it." And I think that that's—I can only—again, it's a perception, I don't know if it's true. Well, let me see—I believe that under Dr. Hamburg and maybe under Alan Pifer, I don't know, they had more elaborate trustee dinners, and things like that. But I think that what Vartan has instituted is more the idea of: you're interesting people. Why don't you tell each other about each other? Just because he thinks they are interesting people. So I think it's primarily in his letter to the board that there is some exchange of information about what the trustees are doing. But it's also, it's kind of formal. You get a paragraph: Dr. X did this and Ms. Y did that and was given this award and participated in this thing. And then we collect news clips, and I think that's because Susan was a journalist and liked news clips. So I mean, there always was Burrelles[*Luce*] here. We don't have that anymore. We don't need it. But so we collect news clips, and the trustees make a lot of news, so that's—

Q: [Laughs] When there is a board—it just strikes me that these are really rather short. They're four times a year, but they're not elaborate meetings upon meetings. Obviously, the trustees don't get into the weeds. That's some policy or direction level. So I'm trying to figure out, from your point of view, have you seen any dramatic changes during the last twelve years? I mean, do they make a difference, or is this really a staff-run institution?

Lerman: Again, it's a hard question for me to answer because I don't interact with the trustees. So I really don't know how much influence they have or don't have. It does seem to me a very staff-run organization because there are people with very powerful beliefs and intentions and dedication to get things done. So I'm assuming that most of the program direction comes from the program staff and from Vartan.

Q: Yes, I think that's right. Well, in the period that you've been here—obviously, there have been—as I said earlier, big events and what happens, and this is important for foundations as well. I'd just like to spend a moment on three big events, and how this influenced the communication strategy. I guess September 11 [2001]. What happened inside, and what happened in the communications strategy? Did this sort of shove other things out, or was this—

Lerman: No, I think there was a conscious effort not to have that happen. Other than, there was more emphasis on—I think that's where the Islam programs came from. But I think there was a very conscious effort, again, to follow the mission, knowledge and information. But not to change course other than—there were a lot of grants that were made to New York City, and this is an organization that is, its home base is New York City, and so understanding that the city had

been damaged. We made grants to help the city, but again, in the way that the corporation would—there were grants to libraries, and grants to help teachers, and that sort of thing. And in Washington D.C. as well. So I think that September 11 did not change the way we did business. It just opened more program areas.

Q: And it did change temporarily certain kinds of—I mean, that was not a programmatic focus before, so it did seem to me that it—there was a response anyway.

Lerman: Well, interestingly, we had a piece—I was just looking at it yesterday, as a matter of fact, for another reason. [Samir] Sam Afridi was one of Bill Clinton's speech writers, and he was someone that Susan knew. And before September 11, we had him write a Challenge Paper, actually, about Muslims in America, Muslim identity. So that was something—

Q: Oh, that was before.

Lerman: It was before. So that was something that was at least on the radar screen here. And I would assume—I can only assume, I don't know, I've never asked the question—It was because of V.G., because of his experience as an Armenian Christian growing up in a Muslim, majority Muslim country. It was probably something he was very aware of in a way that many people weren't. And Sam, who wrote the piece for us, was himself Muslim—is Muslim.

Q: And what about [Hurricane] Katrina?

Lerman: Same thing. Again, we responded with a big grant. I think it was two million dollars. It was an attempt to—it was the Broadmoor neighborhood that had been destroyed, and their library had been destroyed. Susan probably did or could talk in great detail about this because she was very involved. What we wanted was to help them not only rebuild their library, but spur community development with the library as inspiration. I think it became the Rosa [F.] Keller [Library and] Community Center. So we gave money, but again the intent was focused on what we care about—libraries, books, learning.

Q: So you don't see that as a diversion from—it seemed to me that there was a nicer fit between September 11 and Islam than Katrina, which seemed to me more like a natural disaster and the kind of charitable impulse that an individual would have, as opposed to a more studied one that a foundation would have.

Lerman: And I guess I would disagree because it was—what we helped them give themselves back was their library. And I think that that's something that Andrew Carnegie would have probably found lovely. We didn't give them restaurants or houses or money to fix the aquarium. We helped them put their neighborhood back together at its center, its library.

Q: Why don't we spend a moment on 2008? Because prior to that moment, the endowment had gone up substantially, and then obviously it went down substantially. So I'd like to get a feel for what it was like to be inside the corporation at that time. What was the atmosphere, and what were people preoccupied with?

Lerman: I can only tell you—to some degree secondhand. I know that from what Susan told me, Vartan was very concerned about the corporation's endowment. And that there was a lot of cutting back on stuff. But I—personally, I never had any concerns that this organization was not going to do just fine. It had gone through, almost, at that point, almost a hundred years of wars and I think they had lost a ton of money, at some point, in the '70s, whenever it was, the endowment had also gone down. And I thought, if any place was going to be fine, it would be Carnegie Corporation because it was never going to lose all its money and whatever money it had, it would continue to give away, and the investments—people would invest it. It was a very scary time in general for everybody, so they cut back on things. And the program people could speak more about what they cut back on in terms of programmatic stuff. I think people—there was a year, I believe, we didn't get raises, and Susan was very concerned about the cost of the publications. Oh, that was one thing—you had asked me earlier about whether we disagreed on stuff. And there was one thing that we did disagree on in that period, which is that she wanted to pay some of the vendors less—like the designers and the writers—and I wouldn't do it. I understood why she wanted to, but I wouldn't do it. So there was that kind of atmosphere. But I mean, I didn't come to work every day feeling, oh my God, everyone's afraid and gloom and doom and stuff. It was more, you know, your personal life was affected than—

Q: So no one lost—no one was let go during that period?

Lerman: No one was what?

Q: Let go, I mean, the staff, as far as you know?

Lerman: No. No. No, and I think that was part of the goodness of the family idea of this place was, no, nobody was going to get fired because of this. Nothing had gotten that dire. And it was something that I understood we should all be very, very, very grateful for. And I was. And still am, that in this great darkness, this organization shepherded its employees through and took nothing away from them.

Q: One of the things that I was surprised to learn was that, in fact, Carnegie was rather late getting into the professional management of its assets. When [D. Ellen] Shuman was hired—do you recall there being any staff discussion of that? The trustees had done it for a long time, and bringing in somebody who knew something on a day-to-day basis. How was that seen?

Lerman: She was—and I think you're talking about Ellen Shuman.

Q: Yes.

Lerman: She was here when I came. So it's not something I know anything about.

Q: I see, so the—2008 was seen as it was happening everywhere, and not any particular responsibility of the investment staff here, any of those events—

Lerman: Well, I remember being at board meetings and Ellen talking about it, and everyone was very, very concerned and very serious. And they were doing all kinds of strategic things to deal

with it. It was very, very serious. But after a very brief time, I don't think the staff felt endangered that the organization was going to take it out on them in any way. I think there more was the sense that the organization had a responsibility to keep us all going.

Q: One of the things that I realized in looking at that period, though, that makes this foundation different from others, or from a university, is that there's not money coming in.

Lerman: Right.

Q: Which means that other places are growing or getting new contributions, or if you go down, you try to make an appeal or something. So I just thought perhaps the atmosphere might have been [laughs] more upsetting. But you're not the first person to say that it actually was pretty calm.

Lerman: Yes.

Q: And people didn't feel threatened.

Lerman: Yes, we took it seriously, the idea of in perpetuity. We figured the place would here in perpetuity.

Q: Here in perpetuity, yes, and the peace was not going to break at any time soon. Yes, exactly. I don't know whether this would have been apparent to you—it seemed to me that one of the—

there were a lot of things that came out of McKinsey that were—panned out. The one that didn't seem to pan out was Neil [R.] Grabois. And I just wondered what that looked like from the publications part of the house.

Lerman: Can you be more specific on what you mean?

Q: I mean, he was obviously hired and was expected to make certain kinds of decisions about programming, et cetera. And it just didn't happen and then he left. And I just wondered if there was any residue of that anywhere else in the house.

Lerman: Again, it's something that I can't really talk about because I don't know that much about it. To me, it was just, you know. It was another transition. A person was here for—a very nice man, very smart, lovely man, was here for a while, and he did things one way and then they decided to do them another way. Again, it may be the working-class view of things. At the higher levels, things change, and you say, yes, sir, okay, we're going to do it this way now.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: King is dead, long live the king.

Q: But you've been—I mean, you've been reporting or communicating about philanthropy for a long time. How would you describe the—is there any change in message over this period of time?

Lerman: Over what period of time?

Q: I mean, 1977 or '80, versus 2012 or—

Lerman: Yes, when I was younger, I had no idea that this was philanthropy. I don't know that I even knew the word "philanthropy." It seems to me a concept that—again, this is really just me talking from my perspective. This is something that came into my understanding of something we had to communicate about as an area or an issue or an activity in this second job here, that philanthropy was a concept. So now I understand that philanthropy is a concept. And Vartan has taught me the difference between charity and philanthropy, because we've written about it a lot. And I guess it's more of an issue in American society because of the whole income inequality issue, that there are so many more people with huge amounts of money and many more people who don't have enough money, and what is the responsibility of people with huge amounts of money to do something to improve society? And then you have the argument of—to improve society, or to improve the nation, to improve the lives of people. But that's a whole other discussion.

Q: If I've understood things correctly, he—that is, Gregorian, has been—taken Andrew [Carnegie] to the field, or whatever you want to call it. I mean, trying to interact with other people with huge means to do something about it. Is that part of—

Lerman: What do you mean?

Q: Well, I mean, talking to wealthy individuals to try to get them to act more like Andrew Carnegie than Donald [J.] Trump or something.

Lerman: Well, that is something that is one V.G.'s messages, is that Andrew Carnegie wasn't kidding—with great wealth comes great responsibility. You shouldn't keep it, you should give it away. And I believe he believes that sincerely. And so we do write about that a lot. And that's why the message is still relevant.

Q: What is the communication task now with other foundations? Is it the partnership angle, is it seed money—you complement this, or you get on a pile afterwards. I mean, when you're trying—whom do you have in mind with your series of publications here? Which other foundations would be targets for your affection or message as part of this?

Lerman: Oh, I don't see other foundations as any target of these publications. They certainly are a big factor in our media outreach when we're working with another foundation. But I never think, should I write this or not write this or do it this way because of the Rockefeller [Foundation] or Ford or blah blah blah Foundation? It's never an issue. It is an issue absolutely for the press office, but not for the publications.

Q: I see. So that would be the press preoccupation. I mean, the kinds of criticism—I'm running into [Patricia] Pat [L. Rosenfield] on the way in, that she'd been on a panel and there are a couple

of new books saying that the major foundations are all on the same wavelength and all of the pockets of the left wing, wherever that is in the United States, et cetera. So that's—that's not a—

Lerman: I haven't been invited to those "secret meetings," so I don't know.

Q: [Laughs] There are a couple of new books out, but that's not a preoccupation of the publications programs, per se.

Lerman: You mean are the foundations acting in some kind of collusion?

Q: Yes.

Lerman: No.

Q: That's not it.

Lerman: It's not even anywhere near an issue. And by the way, if anyone's listening, we aren't.

Q: [Laughs] The preoccupation—the real genuine interest of a historian as head of a foundation—when did the notion of a centennial enter? I mean, all birthdays are, I guess, an event for a communicator. But a centennial is a particular one. So when did you start planning for that? What were the concerns that were kicking around?

Lerman: Well, I don't remember exactly, but it was a couple of years before. And Vartan was very specific about the message that we were going to communicate, which was, this is not about Carnegie Corporation. It's about Andrew Carnegie and therefore it's about all the Carnegie organizations. And so I think we've been very, very clear in all our activities that when we are celebrating our centennial in the various ways we've done it, it has been to acknowledge the founder and the other twenty or so organizations that he created. In particular, those that we work most closely with, like the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. And that was V.G.'s construct.

Q: But how is the funding for the centennial that was here—this is not a shared funding, is it?

Lerman: Well, I don't know what you mean by funding. The activities that we've carried out—

Q: Yes, that's what I meant.

Lerman: The corporation, as it normally would, has paid for things that it would normally pay for. One of the big things that was a celebration of our centennial was the last Carnegie Medals of Philanthropy, which were the Carnegie Medals of Philanthropy, but also were in various ways tied into our centennial. So the corporation paid for whatever it usually pays for with that activity.

Q: So there's not a cost-sharing that's going on, really it's—

Lerman: No, I mean, the corporation made centennial grants. We actually didn't have lots of—on purpose, didn't have lots of big fancy activities. It would have been inappropriate, especially in a time of economic distress for the nation, for the corporation to start throwing big parties for itself. So we didn't do anything like that. We did what I think was the right thing, which is acknowledge our centennial. This is an old organization that's done great things. It should be recognized. But we did it in the most generous way that we could think of, which was originally Vartan's idea, which is to celebrate the whole family of Carnegie institutions who are—when you look at the range of things they do, it's really remarkable. From celebrating hero dogs to working on international peace. It's quite a lot to come from one man.

Q: While we're speaking about history, how has this whole oral history project been perceived inside the staff? Does this seem like something that is worthwhile, should have been done, needs to be done?

Lerman: I actually haven't talked to anybody about it, so I couldn't tell you.

Q: Oh, really?

Lerman: Yes.

Q: And there was—I mean, there's been no announcement or no discussion when the board set aside the money to do this?

Lerman: I don't know.

Q: I see. So there obviously hasn't been a public relations or communications piece on this.

Lerman: No, it's a—we were told who was going to participate and—

Q: That's it. I think you ought to maybe—[laughs] I don't know which of these various publications it should go in, but it seems to me that this—one of the unusual things about the branding is this sense of history. And this being the third oral history. And there have been a series of books, and Pat doing her quite overdue book. It seems to me that there may be a story about—because this is not navel-gazing history. It's trying to make it useful. So I would've thought that one ought to write a story there somewhere.

Lerman: Well, I guess it's seen more as—if we were going to do a story about something like this, I think we would focus it more on the idea that we have an archive and that the corporation is interested in its history.

Q: Yes.

Lerman: But I think the oral history itself is seen more as a resource for people doing research. So, it's not—it doesn't strike me as such a fantastic story. I mean, it's something you could say pretty quickly. The corporation is very interested in its history. It does everything it possibly can

to keep a record of what it's done so that researchers in the future who want to write about this sort of thing will have a rich archive to consult.

Q: What about new staff members? I mean—

Lerman: What about them?

Q: —it seems to me most institutions have no institutional memory, more or less. Do new staff members get some sort of indoctrination on this topic, or not?

Lerman: I don't know. I mean, that's something that would be handled by the human resources.

Q: Sure, but I mean, it seems to me that that would be one of the uses for some of this, anyway, that—

Lerman: Yes, but you'd be looking at really old stuff because—right? Doesn't this stuff get put away for a while or something?

Q: Yes, although some of it, I think, is going to be—some of the video interviews and other things are supposed to be, I think, more readily available, or parts of the more readily available. It seems to me that—I mean, I'm just quite flabbergasted when I look at the United Nations, which is something I studied—

Lerman: Yes.

Q: —as a contemporary analyst and as a historian, et cetera, and how many younger people are [laughs] unaware of the person after whom the institute I directed—"Who was this guy? What did he do?" And these are people who work for an institution that he helped put on the map. So I'm just sort of puzzled at how little time is spent on—

Lerman: I think it's human nature to despise the person whose job you've taken, and to assume that he or she was an idiot, and you're going to do it much better.

Q: [Laughs] You're going to do [laughs] do what's next. I see. [Laughs]

Lerman: So what do you need to know about old [chooses name randomly] George? He was a jerk, I know a lot more, and here we go.

Q: [Laughs] Here we go again. Do you see any reaction, defensive or elation, in relationship to the vast sums of money that seemed to be coming online in the private world of philanthropy, whether it's the Silicon Valley folks or [the Bill & Melinda] Gates [Foundation] or any of these other numerous sources of funds that just kind of dwarf what's here. Is there an identity crisis of any kind, do you think, that'll result from this, or do people forget—

Lerman: Do you mean at the corporation?

Q: Yes.

Lerman: No, because of what I said earlier. This is a place that is very sure of its identity. With many swings far and away from its identity, from time to time, in the end, it always comes back to what its mission is—again, the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding. So because of its history, because of its integrity, because of its mission, because of the fact that it, I think, is as true is it can be as times change to its founder's legacy. I don't think it's the amount of money that the organization has, but the way it uses its money, and that's where I think V.G.'s idea of an incubator, not an oxygen tank came from. And I've seen it myself—small amounts of money can create great things. We gave just a little bit of money to StoryCorps when it started out. That's the organization that had set up—that's one thing that did happen after September 11. It set up a booth, I think, in Grand Central [Terminal], and people would come and tell their stories about being an immigrant, or—and then they did after September 11, and now it's a national organization that is collecting stories from people about various things. And we gave them $65,000, two grants. We gave them nothing. But it was a young guy and he came here and—this is totally Susan's doing, for which she's to be greatly congratulated. She saw something in this, she gave them money, and they were able to build themselves into a big national organization. So small amounts of seed money can lead to something terrific.

Q: Where we began much of this was that you define yourself as a writer. You've been a writer here. But if you can separate out your private life, what would you look back on, and say, over this period of time, you're happiest about, or biggest achievements in this part of your professional life that is at Carnegie?

Lerman: I was a really good—I am—I'm a really good editor, and I've worked with a lot of really terrific writers. And I brought in really good writers to write about what the corporation did. I've enjoyed that. I mean, it's been very personally rewarding to work with top-quality writers and to know that I did well by them, as well as by the organization, that it was a good marriage. The organization got what it needed, which was really good writing, really good content. The writer got paid well, was dealt with very professionally, was dealt with very lovingly. And so it benefited both parties.

Q: Who are the two or three most memorable?

Lerman: Writers?

Q: Yes.

Lerman: It was great fun for me to work with [David] Dave Marash, who I remembered from my childhood as a sports reporter—

Q: Oh, he was a sports reporter on—oh, my gosh.

Lerman: Yes, CBS or ABC. I don't remember.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: But who had become a general reporter. And he had been in the Balkans a lot, and so we asked him to go to the Balkans, and write about that. And then he ended up—I think, actually, it was somewhat controversial, but it was after I was involved with him—he went to work for Al Jazeera [English] for a while, I think. But it was great fun for me to be working with somebody that I had seen on TV when I was a kid, and I was very in awe of, and to have him saying, "Was it any good, Eleanor? Was the article any good?" "Yes, Dave, it was very good." So that was fun.

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: I've worked for a long time with a writer named Joyce [?] Baldwin, a very long time—twenty years, at the American Lung Association and here. And she's done some wonderful pieces for us and she's editing Pat's book on the corporation's international work. God bless her. The patience that she's had, to deal with this gigantic amount of writing. So that's been very rewarding that I built that kind of relationship with a writer, that I could say, look, this is going to be a really difficult project on many levels. Help. And she said, "Sure." And again, it's been good for both of us. We've been able to pay her a very reasonable amount of money in a time when it's very hard for freelancers to make a living. But she's done an extraordinary job that I don't know anybody else could have done. And I know that it's because she and I have a really good writer-editor relationship that I've been able to put myself in the position of "I'm going to be the psychiatrist in this. You be the editor. Pat's the writer."

Q: [Laughs]

Lerman: We're going to have a proofreader and a bunch of other people, but I'm going to be the one in the middle who's going to soothe everybody.

Q: I see.

Lerman: So that's worked out really well. So I think those have been among the highlights.

Q: Who has the cattle prod?

Lerman: Vartan.

Q: Okay. [Laughs]

Lerman: And the corporate secretary, Ellen Bloom, I think, has really been pushing Pat.

Q: Yes, I was going to say—

Lerman: It is overdue, and it's—yes, it's got to get finished. We're trying.

Q: Yes, indeed. Because I—it would have been very useful for me, [laughs] in all of this, to have at least had some of it. Rather ironic. I chortled, I must admit, when I read—this will be the last

thing I'll quote back at you from yourself—in that *Literary Kicks*, saying, "I'm thankfully becoming a little strange again." What does that mean? [Laughs]

Lerman: What does that mean. Okay, so that's the stuff that is Carnegie-inappropriate. But I was a strange, angry kid. I guess the best way to say it is when—the first book I wrote, when I was twenty-one, was a book of poetry. It was reviewed by the *New York Times*, and the *New York Times* said, "If books of poetry were given ratings, Ms. Lerman's book would deserve a double X." And I was shocked by that because there weren't any bad words or anything in it. So it was sort of—I think they objected to young girls writing about sex, drugs, and rock and roll. But it was 1970-something.

Q: —-three, -two?

Lerman: 1973. So, again, long, long complicated story. And I've talked about it a lot. I went through a lot of changes and wrote a lot of stuff and then I didn't write anything for a while. Went back to writing after—well, I shouldn't say went back to writing. I wrote a lot of nonfiction in a period when I wasn't writing poetry or fiction. When I went back to it—oh, God, tell this story again. I got a letter. Sometimes God writes to you. And I got a letter from a publisher saying, "We used to know your work when you were younger, would you like to go back to doing all that?" And I knew that if I did, I was going to have to change my life, and all kinds of things were going to have to happen. But I did. So the older I got, the less I began to—when I was younger, there was a part of my life in which I was trying to be normal, to be like everybody else. Because I didn't feel that I'd been successful as a strange writer. So I was trying to be a

normal person, and that didn't work out either. So I began to let myself, as I got older, be more and more who I really was. Actually, now I'm writing science fiction, almost.

So Carnegie Corporation has been an important part of this part of my life because it gave me the stability, the money, the respect, the kindness, the affection of my colleagues to have the normal life of getting on the train and going to work and doing a job that I'm good at, and that I'm happy to be doing, and to go off in my other life, and do whatever it was I wanted to do. So I think the fact that this organization has given me a very stable, respectful, respected life has allowed me to accept, delve into more the work that I wanted to do on my own. And while I'm saying that, I have to also say that a great deal of that has to do with Vartan. He dealt with me, as a writer, in a way that, for me, was enormously fulfilling. It was like the old cliché of the flower looking at the sun and saying, "Oh, okay. I'll watch you." Because he trusts me so much as a writer, it's helped me trust myself more. And because he has an eccentric side that is, I think, bemused by my eccentric side, it's allowed me to be as eccentric as I want, and not worry about, well, what are they going to think at the office? They don't care. And because they don't care, it's wonderful.

Q: [Laughs] That's very nice. What should I have asked that I didn't? I'm never quite sure while I prepare these—

Lerman: No, you asked a lot. You asked a lot of stuff I don't know about. And I don't know about it because I either wasn't privy to it, or I wasn't interested in knowing. And I didn't need to know. I think one of my strengths here has been that I really don't care about why they're making decisions about things. I don't care about the political aspects of why they're making decisions

about things. And I mean the inter-office politics. I'm assuming that the people above me know what they're doing. I assume that they're—from what I see—they're good people with good intentions. They make mistakes, but they don't make mistakes because they're mean or evil—they make mistakes. We all do. And so I have faith with the people I work for and with, and I have faith in this organization. It's served me well professionally and personally, and I'm very grateful to it.

Q: Indeed. Maybe that's a good place to halt.

Lerman: Okay.

Q: Thanks so much.

Lerman: Thank you.

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