Philip Whalen '51

September 22, 1998

Interviewed by John Sheehy '82

Location: Hartford Street Zen Center, San Francisco

The following interview with Philip Whalen, class of 1951, was conducted on September 22, 1998, at his home in the Hartford Street Zen Center in San Francisco, where he is the resident abbot, by John Sheehy '82 for the oral history project at Reed College.

Sheehy: I thought we'd start with some early biographical information in respect of how you found your way to Reed, and perhaps what some of your early interests were that made Reed attractive to you. I understand you grew up in the Northwest.

Whalen: Yes, in The Dalles, about eighty miles east of Portland. Although I was born in Portland, I never lived there.

Sheehy: Did your family live for a long time in the Dalles?

Whalen: Yes. They moved first to Centralia, Washington, for a couple of years, then to The Dallas. I don't remember much about Centralia, Washington, except that there was

visitation by the Queen of Romania wearing a green felt hat. A large group of people were terribly disappointed that she didn't have her crown on. That was quite surprising. So, at any rate, she was supposedly the heroine of Mr. Sam Hill's life, so he built the Maryhill Castle for her.

Sheehy: Up along the Columbia River?

Whalen: Oh, yes. And he's entombed, you know, right on the highway between Maryhill Ferry, what used to be the Maryhill Ferry, and the top of the hill where the reproduction of Stonehenge is built. They have this big plaque in the side of the hill.

So anyway, I was born in Portland to poor but honest parents who moved eventually to The Dalles. That's where I went to grade school and high school and so on. I developed an enormous reading habit in the course of my life, and I was very interested in history and biography and science and everything, interested in everything, so I read a whole lot in the city library. I developed this bookish disposition.

When I was in high school, we had a very good outfit up there somehow or another. I don't know how it happened, but in that high school they used the Harold Rugg series of social science texts, which in many communities was thrown out because it talked about industrial revolution. People thought, "Oh, no. No, no, no. We can't have our children talking about the industrial revolution."

But somehow they kept it in The Dalles High School, and Mr. Rugg, Professor Rugg, or whoever he was, came on very strong about who told you so, who wrote the

text, who wrote this book and who published this book, and who is the publisher, where did the money come from, and who was the person who wrote the book? Whose axe was he grinding? And so forth. And to get into what is a large part of writing history is who's in control. And what are you reading? How close to authentic sources are you using?

So this was an extremely valuable kind of education to me—that you should always look and see. Read the newspaper—who published the newspaper? Was he a Republican or a Democrat? And then the same thing goes with government. Who is the government? So there was all that, plus I was very interested in art, and I played in the band. I played percussion instruments. I was no good with doing sports and had no interest in them, except that friends of mine did. So I would go and watch them play or play with the band. Or play with the band if it was one of those occasions where we played at a game.

We had interesting people there. There was a man called Albert Keester who taught senior English and who invented a school literary magazine with poems in it. He had a course in creative writing. He also had a course in public speaking and a course in drama and a course in I don't know what all, poetry, as well as just ordinary English courses. He was a very lively and funny man, and he was very interested in producing plays with The Dalles play actors.

There was a man who taught chemistry, a man called Wells, and he actually worked at some of the small industries around town to control how much—what do they call it? What's the embalming fluid? You know what it is.

Sheehy: Formaldehyde?

Whalen: Yes. How much formaldehyde does it take to make a vat full of maraschino cherries. And so you had to figure that out down at the maraschino cherry manufacturing plant. Control all these solutions and things. They take the cherries and bleach them with one kind of solution, and then they run it through the formaldehyde solution to harden them, and then they paint them, and then they bottle them in this unspeakable syrup in the jar of maraschino cherries. And then, also, down at the—it was some kind of flour mill on a small scale, had something to do with that—bleach them or whatever.

Anyway, he was in the world and in the school, and he had children of his own. He was available to talk to, as were many of the other teachers. They were there, and they weren't hitting on you about "Why don't you shape up?" You could ask them questions and talk to them, and they would recommend things to do or to read, which was very, very good. So there were a number of such teachers there that I worked with.

I had some idea that I wanted to be a doctor of medicine, and my parents thought that was just wonderful. In school, of course, I don't have math enough to do diddily-squat about chemistry or physics or anything else scientific I suppose, but anyway I still held to this idea that I wanted to go off to the University of Oregon and study medicine.

Sheehy: How did you come to hear about Reed?

Whalen: There was news. There was always news around about this institution in Portland called Reed College, which was a phenomenally difficult and high-class outfit, that it was very, very hard to be taken in there as a student. Students who were in there had to work their asses off to stay, and it had many, many, many requirements for students to fulfill. It was about fourteen times harder than going to Eugene or Corvallis or wherever else you get educated, and the people who got out of there became Rhodes scholars instantaneously. [Laughter] And they were certainly—along with their diploma—they automatically got a Phi Beta Kappa key, and all sorts of other things like that. So, you know, it was out of this world, sublime, and the idea of being a student there was unbelievable. In the first place, it was very expensive. In the next place, I wanted to go to the University of Oregon.

Sheehy: Was there another reputation for Reed out in The Dalles other than its high academic standards?

Whalen: I never heard about how it was "Communist Party West," although about a couple of years before I graduated from Dalles High School, maybe it was about a year after I graduated, my father told me that a friend of mine that I had known from high school, two friends of mine, had gone on to Reed and were delighted and very excited about it. He kept telling me about it and so forth, about the different teachers and the curriculum, and I thought, well, that sounds very nice, but I still was wanting to go to the university.

But it turned out I wasn't going to go to the university because there wasn't any money to send me there. So I had to get a job, you know, live with my father, and did until 1943, when I was drafted into the Army, into the Army of the United States, as it was called then, and was put into the Army Air Corps as a radio operator, an instructor in radio operation. The upshot of that was, for example, that when I went into Reed, that experience was used to fulfill the science requirement, thank God, because I think I pretty much flunked out on Biology 101. So anyway, I was in the Army three years, a month, and a day when I got out. I thought what I wanted to do was go to the University of California and study Chinese.

Sheehy: Were you stationed in the States during the entire war?

Whalen: Yes. My eyes are so dim, even at that time, that they couldn't do much with them except to have me teach school. So that's what I did, teach people how to operate radios in the air and on the ground. All that time I was busy writing and so forth, writing poetry, because it turned out that I could finish poetry, although I was trying to write a novel for some time in my spare time, but it would turn bad. And so poetry went easier since it took less than a few hours to do. And that's how this poem-writing habit got going. It started in high school with the encouragement of Albert Keester, and then swelled up. I was in the Army, trying to write a novel and other stuff.

So when I got out in 1946 I was still interested in Oriental art and philosophy and whatnot that I had picked up out of the public library at The Dalles. So I decided I

wanted to do Chinese, and the best place to do it was in Berkeley. When the time came to remove myself and my belongings to Berkeley, it turns out that I didn't have any money at all. So what was I going to do? The thing is, here was the G.I. Bill of Rights and here was Reed College, and I figured, well, I'm going to go and sign up at that school and the government will give me a stipend to live on, so I will be able to sit down, go to school, and write a novel to make money to flee the scenes.

So, you know, happy me. I go out there and take this supposedly horrendous entrance exam, which took a long time and wasn't that hard as far as I could see, except for the mathematical parts of it, which were totally blank. In any case, I was accepted as a student. And at that time they were accepting anybody and everybody who came anywhere near that building. They'd grab them, you know, anybody who was a veteran, they'd grab them and they'd say 'Oh, boy, you've got to get into a school like this,' and the government paid [for] it. Up until that time, '45, '46, the freshman class at Reed would always be something like about 150 people, and the senior class would be like seven or eight, because the junior qualifying exam would wipe them out, and also, at the end of the freshman year a good size group would transfer out. Well, so imagine, here's this entering class of old men veterans.

Sheehy: So you were among the first batch of the G.I. Bill students at Reed?

Whalen: No. I was the second batch. The first batch came out in late 1945, I think, the fall of '45, and then I came on in the fall of '46, but still quite a lot of us were veterans

there. And then, of course, there were all the youth of America, who were seventeen years old and very bright indeed, who were signed up as students. So here was this group of ancient veterans, ancient-feeling veterans, mixed up with these bright-eyed kids of seventeen, and here was this bemused faculty, wondering what was happening to them, what were they going to do with all these people.

At that time, the hero of the faculty and the whole establishment was Rex Arragon, Reginald Francis Arragon [history and humanities professor, 1923-1962, 1970-1974], Ph.D. Harvard, etc., etc., etc., holder of the—what was it, somebody's [Richard F. Scholz] Chair of History. So he was the "man" academically. And there was Monty Griffith {psychology professor, 1926-1954], professor of Philosophy, who was marvelous, and Loxley Griffin [Frank Loxley Griffin, mathematics professor 1911-1952, 1954-1956 as President], who was the author of this textbook on economics, and there was a wonderful man who taught French and had such a thick New England accent that you couldn't tell that he was speaking French. He was a very nice man, very endearing, with a dog who came to his classes called Sissy. And Sissy would sit up by him up in the front of the class, and presently he would be licking his balls, and he would say, "Sissy, Sissy, *tais-toi! Tais-toi*! And then he'd go on about the leonastic something. Woodbridge, Benjamin Mather Woodbridge, holder of some fancy medal from the Belgian Government because he knew more about Belgian literature than anybody before or since. He was a wonderful man.

There was a real fireball kid from Woods Hole or some such place as that. What was his name? He was sort of next to the head of the biology department. Anyway, it

doesn't matter. But they were very learned and, again, available. You could ask questions and talk to them.

And, of course, the other historical or humanities hero and crown prince of language was Richard Jones [history professor, 1941-1982, 1985-1986], who was the pride and joy of Dr. Arragon. Dr. Jones, of course, was not yet Dr. Jones because he couldn't pass the language qualifying examination for his doctorate. And after enough years went by, he came down here one time and got a--what do you call it? It's some sort of a thing that says, "Okay, you can't pass the language examination, but we're granting you the Ph.D. anyway. Goodbye."

So then he became Dr. Richard Jones. A very good doctor and a very interesting man. You could find him in the coffee shop, usually, rapping about one thing or another. He was married to this gorgeous blonde.

Sheehy: So you were thrown in with all these younger students and part of this G.I. mix and a faculty that was rather bemused by the whole situation.

Whalen: Yes. And I had Marianne Gold [artist-in-residence, 1945-1951], who was the art teacher. So all this is taking place in this funny, almost invisible college campus, which consisted of Eliot Hall and the old dorm buildings and the president's house and Anna Mann cottage. And everything else was a mess. There was this huge gymnasium made out of plywood that they got some part of from the government at some point that could act as a theater as well as a gymnasium [Botsford Auditorium].

Sheehy: That was over by Eliot?

Whalen: No. It was back a way, toward where the swimming pool was, behind the swimming pool, and then, in between someplace, there was the little funny building that was the art department where Marianne held forth, which was partly a big room with many windows. Then there was a second room in the back of it where the kiln was, where they pottered, and she was firing statues also.

Then there was the Glenn Chesney Quiett Memorial right behind that. Behind that there was the lake and the swan called Gordon, who was a menace to society, come at you hissing and holding out his wings, ready to bop you, and, of course, a swan can give you a bad bop. And then there was the Student Union Building. And then around the corner from that and across lots was the library. I can't remember—it has a wonderful name also, but I can't remember it [Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library], which at that time was very small, a small Tudor building. Then behind that there were these trashy plywood barracks that they had got from the government, I guess, which were called Foster and Schultz, for gentlemen students to dorm themselves up, because there was not enough room in the regular dorms.

So here was this sort of rattletrap lay-out, half Tudor and half plywood, out here in the rain and the pretty Eastmoreland woods, and there we all were, milling around in circles, trying to get educated, I guess. [Laughter]

Anyway, as I say, the faculty were bemused, but they really worked hard to do a job and also to be available to the students and take care of everyone. Even though there were more people there than there had ever been before, they still contrived to be educating twenty-four hours a day somehow or another.

Sheehy: So you had a lot of your interaction outside of campus with professors?

Whalen: Not very much off campus, but quite a lot on campus. About the only person that was available off campus was Lloyd Reynolds [English and art professor, 1929-1969], who would sometimes arrange to see you at his house.

Sheehy: I've also heard there were little soirees at David French's [anthropology professor, 1947-1988] house.

Whalen: Yes. I was never invited to those, because I wasn't one of his students, but I got to know him and to like him, and he seemed to be doing wonders with young people, and he certainly fixed up Gary Snyder [‘51] as a scholar, because Gary had—although he was very, very bright and did very well in high school and had a scholarship, actually, when he got out of high school—you know what a high school is, it doesn't teach you shit—and David French got all of his students to keep a three-by-five card file on each book that they read, put down on the file card the name of the book, the name of the author, the name of the publisher, the date of publication, and then whatever remarks struck them as

useful or interesting so that they could file it away and then find it and use this information. I don't know, I can't remember all the details, but that was one of the major things, to get people to systematize their thinking and their writings, which was quite wonderful.

He was also very accessible. I got to know him because at one point I wanted to look at Robert Graves' book, *The White Goddess*, which the library had a copy of, and it was out. I asked the boss, I said, "Who's got it?"

He said, "Dr. French has it."

That's something that happened of course with faculty who found stuff they wanted and then mark it. So I went over and saw Dr. French [and] asked him about it because I wanted to borrow it.

He said, "Oh, well, I have it in my office. It's really very indiscreet."

[Laughter]

And he thought it was best to sort of sequester it. So I finally, I forget what finally happened. Anyhow, it was fun to talk to him, and get this idea that you had to take care of things. He had a very nice wife also.

Sheehy: I've spoken Jean Scott '51, who was in your class and was the manager of the coffeeshop, and she had a recollection of you and French and Snyder sitting in the coffee shop a lot…

Whalen: Oh, yes. [Laughter]

Sheehy: --and "holding court," in her words.

Whalen: Oh, yes. Not only with him, but as I say, Dick Jones, and Lloyd, and Monty, or a number of other people, other faculty. I don't remember being there with David so much. At any rate, if she says so, it must be true.

Sheehy: We talked a little bit about Stanley Moore [philosophy professor, 19948-1954], too, and she told me that Professor Moore had a houseboat that was popular with students.

Whalen: Well, see, he would invite—you'd run into him on the campus, and he would say, "I'm inviting a number of the elements to come down to the houseboat Tuesday night. Please come."

I said I'd be delighted, so I'd arrange to get a ride or something over to the boat landing and go out to Stanley's houseboat. There would be a lot of liquor. His favorite comestible was smoked Japanese oysters, which were terrible, and he loved rye whiskey, and after a while he'd get all tuned up and he would start reciting Yeats to us, with great charm. And there were a lot of different people there. Monty would come, Monty Griffith, and various other students of all ages and sizes were there. It was people that Stanley thought were interesting. He called Gary and me the (indecipherable). Those are Russian alphabetical designations, one's a hard sound and the other one's a soft sound.

[Laughter] (Interviewer's note: Gary Snyder '51 was unable to recall the indecipherable Russian term).

Sheehy: So were you one or the other, or were you just the combination together?

Whalen: It was just the combination. But anyhow, it was very pleasant. Here you were, the front porch was falling into the river, and it was pretty down there. So the elements would be looking down at the water. Mostly harmless conversation, nothing terribly frightening.

The other sort of on-campus sociable occasion would happen in the spring. I forget why. Maybe it was because of the spring vacation or spring something or other. It was held for everyone to do something useful, pick up trash or something else around the campus. So Bob Crowley ['49] would have one of his horns there, and a couple of other people could play instruments, and I would play the bass drum, and we'd march around the campus tootling and honking and getting people stirred up to do Canyon Day or something like that, and have a lot of fun. Occasionally there would be sort of spontaneous dances that would happen at the Student Union Building, and Bob would play for that. He played two-beat jazz, which was fun.

Sheehy: Was there any type of spring ritual event other than Canyon Day? They have a Renaissance Fair now, but was there a May Day celebration or anything like that?

Whalen: I don't remember. All I can remember is that marching around with the band in the springtime. You know the climate in Portland? You must if you've been to that college. Do you know what happens in February, how all of a sudden the winter suddenly decides to go underground or go elsewhere, and there's about two weeks of bright, sunny weather--

Sheehy: False spring.

Whalen: --and the daffodils come out and the sun shines and it's warm and beautiful, and you go to the swimming pool and you hang out at the swimming pool, don't go to your classes, and then all of a sudden it's snow and silver thaw and God knows what all, and you're back in it. Wonderful Dostoyevsky gloom. So anyhow, that would be something exciting that happens in February, every February.

And then there would be some--I guess it was the Easter holiday, Easter vacation, one way or another we'd get hold of people with a car and drive off to the Oregon coast and hang out in the beach towns, enjoy the seaside. On one occasion I made a great pot of bouillabaisse. Anyway, that was one of the things that would happen in the springtime.

Sheehy: Did you go to the ski cabin at all?

Whalen: I don't know about a ski cabin.

Sheehy: Did you live on campus the first year, or were you always off campus?

Whalen: I was always on campus, unless I was sick and stuck in Glenn Chesney Quiett Memorial. They had this wonderful doctor, lady doctor, who took care of everybody who was sick.

No, first of all, I was living in an attic on 20th Street in Portland and sort of commuting when I had money enough to commute. What happened is that I passed the junior qualifying examination, and then I was—it was that year or the next year that I was denied registration in the fall of some year.

Sheehy: Your senior year?

Whalen: I think it was at the end of my junior year. I think it was in 1949. Anyway, I was out. I was out through the academic year of 1949 to 1950. I pulled wires and I chanted spells, and did dances where you appease the gods, and got myself reinstated. Of course, the reinstatement business depended almost entirely on Lloyd Reynolds and Marianne Gold, who believed in me.

Sheehy: I heard a story that you were busy writing a novel instead of attending to your class work, which was one of the reasons you were ousted.

Whalen: Yes. I was not attending class very much. I remember Ralph Berringer [English professor, 1946-1953], who was a nice guy, who was teaching literature, and I didn't go to his classes. It was interesting. He had the most minute handwriting of any creature I'd ever known. He had these bound-up notebooks, and they were covered—each page was covered with all his notes about English, the French, the Italian, and the Renaissance. And he ended up marrying this lady, this rather ornery lady who was the director of the commons, Betty somebody. Betty Fox [Betty Kreiling Berringer, director of commons and dormitories, 1946-1948]. Anyway, she was a problem.

Bruce Cartozian [‘50] and I had a hard time with that. I ate there very seldom, but Bruce had this small cardboard carton full of all sorts of wonderful herbs and potions with which to doctor the chow, and she would be really annoyed at Bruce putting Tabasco sauce on things.

They were both short people. I love that song, "Short People." [Laughter] "Short people got no reason to live."

Anyhow, during that time I was out on this—I was very broke, and that's how come I got to Lambert Street, and Roy Stilwell [‘50] let me live in part of his room.

Sheehy: The House at 1414 Lambert Street?

Whalen: Yes. That was in 1950.

Sheehy: So you were something of a late arrival. The house had already been set up at that point?

Whalen: Yes. Carol Baker [‘52], I guess, had found it originally. I don't know. She was there with the man that she was married to later, Bill Baker [William Jennings Baker ‘50], and Gary was there in the depths of the basement, in a plywood room, with a little gas plate in the basement, and his old friend Michael Mahar [‘53] was there and the Big Schwiek, that is to say, Mike Murie [Martin L. Murie ‘50] was there, as distinguished from the Little Schwiek, who was Mark something from Massachusetts, who was his sidekick, and so they were called Big Schwiek and Little Schwiek—Schwiek being the soldier who was a menace to society because he kept trying to do everything they told him to do.

Sheehy: I know there were some other nicknames at the house at Lambert Street that were taken from an informal vision quest of sorts. Bob Allen [Robert Lee Allen ‘51] was called "Hoodlatch" for example.

Whalen: Well, he came up with that for himself, but I don't know how or why. He was "Thomas Love Hoodlatch." Anyway, he had been to high school with Gary. His father had an office intercom installation business. Later on, Bobby had to inherit it and tried to get rid of it. But Bobby had a sister called Sarah, Sally, who was an old Reed—she was there during the forties, during the wartime, graduated, I think, in '45, '44 or '45. She was

a very funny woman. She could tell outrageous stories about the college. It's unfortunate that she's dead, or you could talk to her. She'd give you the real low-down on everything because she knew. Anyway, they were a funny outfit. They lived at home. But Bob being a friend of Gary's was around a lot, and how he became Thomas Love Hoodlatch, I never found out.

Sheehy: I think Gary had the nickname "Leitswics."

Whalen: Yes. He made that up for himself. He was—I forget first names. Alexander, I guess. He was Alexander Leitswics, professor of outmoded philology, University of Krackow, or something like that.

Sheehy: Did you have a nickname?

Whalen: Not that I can recall. When I was in the Army I was called "Dumbo, the Flying Elephant" because I had this huge set of leather fleece-lined high altitude clothing--pants and jacket--and an oxygen mask that looked like an elephant's trunk. So I was Dumbo. That was a long time ago. That name never stuck at Reed. It never came up at Reed.

Sheehy: You arrived at Lambert Street in your senior year. So you had re-enrolled in the college?

Whalen: No. I was still out. I came there, like I say, in the fall of 1949, and I think it was sometime in the spring of the next year that William Carlos Williams came out, was there for a week, and gave us all a huge shot in the arm, which was great. He was a great, warm-hearted individual, a big guy, sort of fatherly, and also a hero as a poet and novelist. But he was very modest and couldn't understand why people were making a fuss about him.

But anyway, he gave a poetry reading in the new faculty office building made out of plywood and glass, and it was great, a great reading. Lew Welch [Lewis B. Welch '50] and I were sitting together. We were both breaking up and rolling on the floor. So he met with a small group of us who just sort of hung around him. Then he also had students bring in their work so he could look at it and talk to them about it, mark it up and so on. It was great. He gave a lecture sometime—I forget. Oh, I remember. He read some short stories at a creative writing class—no, an American literature class that was run by Donald MacRae [English professor, 1944-1973], which was funny. Anyway, it was a great excitement to Lew and Gary and all the other people on campus who were into writing, all the people who were hooked up with *Janus* magazine and the regular literary magazines.

Sheehy: Was *Janus* not one of the regular literary magazines on campus?

Whalen: It was set up because there were not enough—the official literary magazine appeared maybe only once a year, and so it was decided by some of us who were writing

stuff we would get it typed up and mimeographed. There was a girl—I'm pretty sure it was a girl, called—her last name was Scott. She was some kin to Professor Scott, the chemistry professor at Reed. I can't think of her first name right offhand. She was the one who volunteered to cut some mimeograph plates and print out this thing called *Janus*, and so we all contributed stuff to that. I forget how many issues. I think it slightly annoyed the contributors of the regular literature magazine, and maybe not. Jesse Green [‘51] was there also, and a woman who has since been teaching in China and who has published a book of her own poems—she was married to my friend Bruce Cartozian for a while. What was her name? Oh, dear. She and her sister both went to Reed. I cannot remember right now. She's still around Portland, as far as I know, teaching. She's a very good writer. All I hear in the back of my head is a mis-recollection of her pet name, which was something funny. She was from Seattle. Anyway, she was somebody very, very nice, and I remember her fondly, and I've seen her since. I saw her on some trip to Portland. Anyway, she was one of the movers behind *Janus*.

Sheehy: When William Carlos Williams was there, did you share any of your work with him?

Whalen: Oh, yes.

Sheehy: Were you in Lloyd Reynolds' creative writing class?

Whalen: Oh, yes. I was always in Lloyd's class. I always enjoyed it, and some of the time I didn't have to do much with it because I kept writing all the time and showed him what I was writing. It was interesting, because we went through a great many poems of Williams' together in his class, and then we also went through *Life Along the Passaic River*, the book of short stories at that time. And what else? Well, we did Joyce's *Dubliners*. That's all I can think of from Lloyd's class at the moment. But I'd take stuff to him all the time.

Sheehy: Did he have any specific input on your poetry at that time, or was there any clear direction he gave you?

Whalen: No, I don't think so. He just kept encouraging me to write more. It seems like that was very valuable. He seemed to get a kick out of what I wrote. So that was very pleasing. But he was very helpful to me in many ways. I thought of him as a great friend and got to know his wife. I hardly was acquainted with his sons, but I knew John a little better.

Anyhow, after a while there was a reply to *Janus* by another outfit—I forget what it was called, it was something rather dirty [Laughter] –to try to talk back, and it didn't work. Anyway, we were able to publish stuff in there and others were able to print in a regular magazine.

Bill Dickey [‘51] went on to be a Yale Younger Poet, and then later on he was out here at State College for a year teaching poetry. William Hobart Dickey, who finally died of AIDS a few years ago. But anyway, he was one of the stars of the class of ‘51.

Another one that I have seen rather recently was Frank Paul Bowman [‘49], who was there, I think, in '46, probably in '45. I'm not sure. I think he graduated in 1950, but he went on to become an exchange student in France. He was able to spend a lot of time in France. He became a teacher of the French language over here at Berkeley for some time and someplace else back East. So I saw him out there about a year or so ago, still very much the same person that I had known at school. He used to write poetry.

So anyhow, besides *Janus* and the regular literary magazine, there was a phenomenon which occurred from time to time. When the students got upset about something that the faculty and/or administration had come out and said or done, a publication called *Lapsus Calami* would appear on campus, usually mimeographed, and attacked the administration. So *Lapsus Calami* was an institution, actually, that people all knew about. (interviewer’s note: Gary Snyder ’51 states that at least one issue of *Lapsus Calami* was anonymously put out by William Dickey ’51).

Sheehy: Was this sort of an underground publication?

Whalen: This was an underground thing, but it had this history behind it of having always existed at Reed. Whenever anything went wonky, the *Lapsus Calami* would suddenly appear.

Sheehy: And this would be a different outlet from the student newspaper?

Whalen: Yes. Yes. It was totally underground. Nobody seemed to know anything about how it ever happened, except it was a Reed tradition.

Sheehy: And it appeared during your time at Reed, then?

Whalen: Yes. I forget what the occasion was, but, at any rate, something the administration did, the *Lapsus Calami* came out. I don't know it, but there was something in your question list about the "thesis parade"?

Sheehy: Yes, one of the rituals.

Whalen: What is that?

Sheehy: When the seniors completed their thesis and handed it in, there's now a parade ceremony that goes from the library to the registrar's office, where you deliver your thesis. It's much like the band that you talked about on Canyon Day. It's made up of whoever can get together with an instrument or beat on a drum or anything else, and people dress in costume or whatever they feel like, and march to the registrar's office.

Whalen: That's very strange, because what happened was, we would write up this document, and it had to be sent to a typist and typed out in a certain format, and then on one of the pages it had a place for your thesis advisor to sign it and some other faculty member to sign it, and they took care of it. You just handed it to them. As far as I know, they turned it in. I never heard about the thesis parade or saw one.

Sheehy: Did you have any ceremony capping off the senior year that you recall?

Whalen: No, not that I can remember. Of course, not living on the campus makes a difference. As far as I know, there was nothing. What was interesting about being a senior at that time was that you could have space in the tower at the library to have a desk and whatever books you wanted there, and you had to share it all with the rest of the seniors who were doing the same kind of thing you were. So it was pleasant to go up there and go through the collection.

I read about that lawsuit that was brought by—what's his name? He was kin to Simeon Reed Winch, a lawyer. Some members of the Reed family went to court to show that Mrs. Reed's will was invalid, the will leaving this vast quantity of money and property to Reed College, which was the intention of her husband Clayton Simeon Reed [Simeon Gannett Reed]. So anyway, some of these people got mad and tried to stall this business and declared the will of Mrs. Reed invalid because she was not a citizen of the state of Oregon at the time of her death. She died in Pasadena. Well, she had a house in Pasadena, where she liked to go during the wintertime, but she maintained a family home

in Portland, and she considered herself, always, a citizen of Oregon. At least that's what Mr. Winch argued, and he made it stick. So the money went to the foundation of the college, and the other relatives who wanted a big piece of it lost. So that was interesting, how that all worked out.

Sheehy: Very. Did they have the theses collected up in the library tower as well at that time?

Whalen: No. No. The theses were in a cage down in the basement of the library, along with the reports from the Smithsonian, reports from other outfits which were interesting to look at. There was one outfit that had this wonderful collection of reports about Mayan archeology. Anyway, that cage was funny, because one was able to go inside. In spite of that, I think Lew's thesis and Gary's thesis are both gone

Sheehy: From the library?

Whalen: The library copy, I guess. That's what I've heard.

Sheehy: I believe that they've made extra copies.

Whalen: It's funny, because there was a man who was in the graduating class a few years back who wrote about poetry and Buddhism and what happened and so forth, and then

later he came down here and went out to study Zen at Green Gulch Farm, a very nice kid. Anyway, he gave me a copy of his thesis, and I think I have a copy of it around here.

Sheehy: I'm curious about your interest in Buddhism while you were on campus and also your Asian interest, which you had already developed before coming to Reed I understand.

Whalen: Well, I had that from the time I was in high school, and I kept reading at it off and on, but at Reed I concentrated more on classical English literature, doing eighteenth century literature with Lloyd and doing nineteenth century European literature with Frank Jones [English professor, 1949-1956]. He was a terrifc guy. He had been a Rhodes scholar, and he had graduated from—what's that big university up in Canada? "Mc" something.

Sheehy: McGill?

Whalen: It's a Scotch name. It's a big famous university. Anyway, he came on there as a Rhodes scholar, and he was at Reed for only a few years. He didn't like it very much, but he had a great sense of humor about him, and was somebody else you could talk to. Later on he got Jackson Matthews' job.

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Whalen: ... '48, '49, '50, somewhere around in there, Jackson Matthews, who had been the boss of—what do you call it—comparative literature at the University of Washington, got this wonderful appointment from the family of this celebrated French novelist or poet, I can't think of who it was, but anyway, somebody everybody knows about. Anyway, he had the job of taking care of this guy's manuscripts and editing it all and making it fit for publication and so forth. So that post became vacant, and Frank got it, kept it. He probably kept it until he retired. I don't know. I haven't heard from him or seen him in years. At any rate, we read Turgenev, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky. Frank was sharp, he was a very sharp, very sharp guy. He was a great wit, laughed a lot. But there wasn't anything going in the Oriental sphere at Reed at that time. I was working—when I first was there, I was working at Humanities 1 with a guy called Layman, Donald Layman [classics professor, 1947-1953], and he was a classical scholar, and he could handle all of the classical language, but he says when he tried to do Sanskrit, he couldn't do it. It was too many bits and pieces to it and he had to give up. Anyway, he could do Greek and Latin. At some point I wrote a paper about how come this so-called humanities course is supposed to be about real civilization, one thing and another, and there was absolutely no news in it about what had happened in China, that there was this large historical and literary tradition in China that I found very exciting, and how come the college couldn't do anything. So I had a conference with him on this paper, and he said, "Not part of our tradition. Go fuck yourself, Whalen."

He was very nice about it. He was very rooted in the Western tradition and couldn't see beyond it or the necessity of even peering around the corners of it. He was adamant, and that's what was real, everything from—I can remember Dr. Arragon lecturing on the Sumerians and so on. [Laughter] Starting with the beginnings of civilization and going on up through the French Revolution, I think, is where we sort of stopped, or the Civil War. At any rate, humanities was something more I said, and I thought, they ought to be looking at it.

Sheehy: Were there no professors at the time who shared your interests?

Whalen: No.

Sheehy: I'd heard the Lloyd Reynolds was a bit of what was called at the time an amateur orientalist.

Whalen: He was, yes, and he was particularly interested in the calligraphy and in the painting, brush painting, and I guess he played with it a little bit. A friend, a man who Lew Welch and Ed Danielsen [Edwin F. Danielsen ‘51] used to see in Chinatown where he worked as a cashier in a restaurant that was catty-cornered from the police station, called Sunasam which means "the new life." The people there were all in favor of Sun Yat Sen. There was this guy, who was probably in his forties, we got talking to him about Chinese things, Confucius and about poetry and such stuff. He was quite a learned

man. Here he was, he was this guy working in a restaurant, and although he had been trained in Chinese language and stuff in Portland after school—he had to go to the Chinese school—and whose parents sent him to Peking when he got out of high school to stay with an uncle out there and study calligraphy and also learned how to cut seals, how to cut personal seals, chops, to stick to letters and things. Lew and Ed kept encouraging him to get out of that restaurant and come to Reed. He had the G.I. Bill coming to him because he'd been in the Army during the war, and he ought to come out to Reed, get a degree, and start teaching about the Orient, about Chinese history and culture and so forth, language, the whole bit. And he finally did. He finally got persuaded to go out there and sign up, but after two years there, it just didn't suit him. He felt that he wasn't getting anywhere there. So he transferred up to the University of Washington, where they had a large department of Chinese history, literature, and so forth, which he got hooked up to. That all became a disaster because they were heavy into this government project of making a translation machine, a machine that would translate Chinese to English. That was the big number up there, and he thought that was really boring, and he finally dropped out of that, came back to Portland and worked in the post office.

Sheehy: This wasn't Charles Leong [‘53] was it?

Whalen: Yes. Anyway, we learned a great deal from him, how to hold the brush, how to start writing characters, how to use a Matthews dictionary, all sorts of lore and so forth, which was terrific. So he was the only China connection at Reed at the time. We got a

lot of good out of him. He also told us how to eat, how to go out to the Chinese restaurant. What you do is you get something that walks and something that swims and something that flies and some vegetables and some soup. And chopsticks, this is how you eat with chopsticks.

Sheehy: Were you also taking calligraphy with Lloyd at the time?

Whalen: Yes. He worked with Lloyd for a while also, just did beautiful work. He caught on right away how to use that little pen to do--.

Sheehy: Chancery cursive.

Whalen: To do Chancery cursive, yes. I have a lot of his letters I kept. Just beautiful. He also continued to do Chinese calligraphy, and one of the things he did with Lloyd was to cut some blocks of calligraphy and show Lloyd this funny technique about how you write the character on paper, then you glue the paper to a block and then you cut around it and cut through it, and cut this printing block that can be used for the character. So Lloyd got a lot of good out of it. And he was crazy about Lloyd. We thought Lloyd was the greatest. Lloyd, I guess it was in 1950 that he moved his old press up, because the science department left the upper floor of Eliot Hall to move outside the building I think, and so then he was able to move his press and the type up to the top floor of Eliot Hall, where he had space also to teach calligraphy. So he showed those of us who were

interested how to set type, how to make it into a form and put it into a press and print it, as well as everything else for handwriting. Anyhow, he, of course, as you say, he was interested in Oriental art and calligraphy and so on. He was very encouraging to us to learn more about it and try to do it and so on. He always said that he was not popular at Reed because he thought people ought to do things. You're not just supposed to sit around and think about things all the time, or speculate about things. Get up and do something. [Laughter]

Sheehy: What a radical notion, huh? [Laughter]

Whalen: And this made him very unpopular, he felt, in this heavily academic institution. Of course, he could do academic things perfectly well. He felt sort of out of step with the institution. So what happened—and now, if my recollection is wrong—Gary insists that I am wrong about this—namely, that he went to the library at some point and found this book about Zen and about how people have these voices they have to make to go see this teacher and say why did the Bohidharma come to China and the teacher would say, "Aaaa!," which would be written down in English as "quatz," and that he had found this book and that we were joking about it in 1951. He said, "There is no such thing. You have got yourself balled up in your memory," and what really happened is that we didn't know anything about it until we were down here in San Francisco and one day he found the four-volume set of Haiku translations by R.H. Blyth, the first volume of which is almost entirely devoted to Zen, Zen and Japanese culture, and lots of quotations from

Daisetsu Suzuki. So then, seeing that, he got hold of the essays of Zen Buddhism by Daisetsu Suzuki and that's where it all started.

Sheehy: And that was post-Reed, is what he's saying. That's not your recollection.

Whalen: No, but then he says my recollection is wrong, and I'm willing to believe that it's wrong.

Sheehy: Now, you already had an interest in Zen from high school.

Whalen: No, just Buddhism. Just Buddhism in general, and I thought it was interesting, but it was too complicated. I was about seventeen, and I was reading Evans-Wentz's book called the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, as taught by Lama what's-his-name [Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup], translated by Mr. W.B. Evans-Wentz. I got bogged down in that, because there were too many footnotes, and at the time I was not into reading footnotes. I thought it was boring. So I couldn't get on with it very well. But I did buy a book by Frederick Lentz. It was called *Esoteric Buddhism*. What is that guy's name? An Irishman [perhaps Alfred Percy Sinnett]. I cannot remember it right now. At any rate, it was kind of an outline of Tibetan Buddhism--at least a very high-class Mahayana. It was great. It had a lot of stuff in it that sounded a lot more reasonable and interesting than Dr. Evans-Wentz'. So anyway, that happened, and then as time went on I got more interested in Vedanta. So all the time I was in the Army, I was having some sort of crisis I was fussing

about. Probably I should join up with my own traditions, as Donald Layman would say, and become a Roman Catholic. Fortunately I was in correspondence with a number of friends who said, "Good God it's not all bleak as that, the black international--what's the matter with you?"

It also occurred to me that the Vedanta business was much more sympathetic to humans than Christianity. That's for sure. And so I got out of the whole idea, pretty much, of Christianity. It was only years and years later that I was reading all of the [unclear] that I could see. I got his view of Christianity as Jesus being this revolutionary character who wanted to change everything into love and beauty and flowers and whatnot, and not this big gloomy thing about being crucified and resurrected and one thing and another, but that it was all a big revolutionary thing about old trash and starting over. Also, I found out from reading Dostoyevsky and so on, that the Russian church had had a whole different angle. The emphasis was on the resurrection, rather than on crucifixion. I thought that was interesting, but not for me.

Sheehy: Did you further develop those religious or spiritual interests while you were at Reed?

Whalen: No. While I was there, whatever interest I had was still vaguely in the direction of Vedanta, and when I first came back to Portland I was very interested in shopping around and seeing what there was there and found out that there was a piece of the Vedanta Society up in the apartment blocks of Portland on the Westside. Finally I

screwed up my courage to go attend one of their Sunday evening lectures. It was interesting. This man called Swami Dayananda, who was from the Rama Krishna Ashram in India, was an authentic teacher of that kind of stuff, and he lectured about something about Rama Krishna which I had read. I had already read through a lot of that material--who was that Frenchman who wrote *The Prophets of the New India* [by Romain Rolland]. I can't remember his name. Anyhow, I had read about Rama Krishna because Henry Miller had mentioned the prophets in a book he wrote, and so I knew that. Anyhow, it was all very interesting. So I went there a couple of times, but it kind of bummed me out because they had all this—little old ladies were there, and mostly old people and sort of substantially rich people sitting there on chairs and being edified by this Indian gentleman about the Vedanta. So I screwed up my courage even further and made an appointment to see him and talk with him about what was going on there and so forth and how it made me nervous, and Swami said I shouldn't worry about it. They had some sort of ashram out in the country, but it was very expensive to go there, so I don't know what it was like. Anyway, one of the notable things that they did was on the occasion of, I think, Dayananda's birthday or something like that, they had this lovely dinner at the church with all this Indian vegetarian cooking, which was just delicious. It was wonderful. But in spite of that temptation, I decided I couldn't hang around all these elderly rich people, so I tried meditating at home and doing that. I learned that, A) meditation actually does work and that, as time went on, I thought, my goodness, I could have stayed with Swami Dayananda to be my teacher and see how it works, but I was too snotty to put up with such a thing, so that I'm a loser, but at least I learned something

about spiritual pride or something like that. It's interesting. Then I had a vision one day while I was going on 20th Street toward Burnside, and I saw this streetcar that passed with all these people all sort of illuminated like the vision of what's his name at the Pentecost—where these people in this streetcar were all, as Ginsberg would say, "all angelic," wonderful. I thought, "Well, that's interesting," so this meditation thing is doing something right. But then I started to go to school and I didn't think about it anymore.

Sheehy: I have some sense that the crowd at Lambert Street was very interested in religion, and I've heard that you had an extensive library collection yourself.

Whalen: Yes. Gary was interested in—he would spend a lot of time talking to Lloyd and other people. We would tease him about being dumb. Of course, he was nineteen years old and had actually been a year in the merchant marine. But he had read a whole lot, and was really a lot smarter than we gave him credit for. So among other things we discussed was the Asian part of history and so on and poetry. Pound had turned us on to reading Fenollosa's book, a two-volume book, Chinese and Japanese-something in Chinese and Japanese civilizations [*Epochs of Chinese art*, 1912]. I can't remember the title. A big book. He was a man who had spent—somehow or another he got interested in Oriental art, and then he went off to Japan and wandered around looking at things, discovering that there were these places in the country that had images or that had hanging scrolls, bold, wonderful. Somehow, I don't know how, the story is that he made representations to the Japanese Government that they were losing their national heritage of art and so forth, and

they'd better fucking go get on the stick and do something about it, and apparently he impressed them to a degree that they gave him an imperial fugat to go around looking at everything and see what was there and make a recording, write it down. So he did that, and the result of it was that they cross-checked him, a bunch of other things, and the Japanese government reared back and had the Emperor give him the Order of the Sacred Mirror Third Class or something like that for his efforts, and they appreciated the fact that he'd actually saved some good things, because a lot of stuff had been going out of the country, partly because of Mr. Fenollosa being there and telling the people at the Boston Museum that there was all these goodies lying about. There were all these impoverished noblemen and samurai and whatnot who were selling family treasures. So that's how something like "The Burning of the Sanjo Palace", that big scroll that's in the Boston Museum, how it got there. It's because he told them and got someone—what's his name, somebody expensive in Boston backed buying all this stuff. Anyhow, Fenollosa also got to know some of the people who were in Noh acting in the theater business and studied something of that and something of the texts. He was very interested, also, in their collections of Chinese material that they had translated into Japanese.

Pound, later on, when Fenollosa was dead, Ezra Pound had got his papers. Mrs. Fenollosa turned them over to him because he was an American who was in London. So he got excited and infatuated, and published his *Cathay*, a book of translations based on Japanese versions of Chinese poetry, which are a little confusing because here was this poet that he called Rihaku, who was a great groovy poet, I thought, and turned out to be somebody else in the Japanese translation. Anyhow, he was the one that hollered about

Fenollosa's papers and what he found out, and about Fenollosa's essay called *Chinese Written Languages as a Medium for Poetry*, which is a very famous essay and had a great influence on American poets--everybody from Amy Lowell to us read that essay. So, he got everybody studying Chinese and looking at it. At one point, I think for my birthday, all these 140 friends of mine pooled all their money together and bought a secondhand copy of Fenollosa's two-volume book to give to me, which I thought was very sweet. Epochs--maybe that was it, *Epochs in Chinese and Japanese Art*. And Fenollosa, he was a Harvard man.

Sheehy: We haven't talked yet about political climate on the campus during your time there. Was it very political?

Whalen: Oh, yes. I'll say. There is the election of—we were very involved, a lot of us, with the Wallace campaign, the campaign of Henry Agard Wallace, who had been Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture, who was running for President against Harry Truman, and you know what happened. But anyway, we all met and marched and sang and walked around the Commons. So there was a lot of meetings and speeches. There was a time, it was '47 or so, that the government reared back and decided that they were going to reinstate the draft, which had sort of come to an end in 1945. They decided that they should have a new draft law saying that everybody eighteen to forty-five would have to register. So with Lloyd's encouragement, a whole bunch of us went downtown to demonstrate against this resolution and marched down Broadway with an American flag.

We always carried a flag or people would get mad at you or throw rocks at you. The thing is that here we were tromping down the street and then right in front of one of the big theaters downtown, here was Richard Meigs [‘50], a friend of ours, who was dressed—I forget, in some mad costume, with an Army helmet liner painted white on his head, and on top of the helmet liner there was a candle. [Laughter] I don't know what he was doing—everybody was pissed off with him. He was very funny. And that was when politics was the Wallace campaign. And then there came the time when the Un-American Activities affairs came around and started summoning. But I was gone by that time. I think that was in 1951 or '52, somewhere. Then there were like about eight or nine people that I had known who were in that Wallace campaign business, who came out, were exposed as members of the Communist party, and their names were printed in the *Oregonian*.

Sheehy: These were students?

Whalen: Former students, people that I studied with.

[Break]

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Sheehy: I'm curious about the transition for you, writing novels and then going to poetry, and then your thesis, your creative thesis. Was that a common thing to do, write a creative thesis?

Whalen: Oh, yes. Bill Dickey did one. In previous years, people wrote novels and so on for a thesis project.

Sheehy: Were these under the guidance of Lloyd Reynolds at the time? Was he a big proponent of the creative thesis?

Whalen: Oh, yes, but then there were other people, like, I think, Don MacRae encouraged some of the others to work on a novel. Anyhow, it was something that had been done before I got there. There were some lively ladies whose names escape me at the moment, one of them who was supposed to be scandalous, was scandalous. You know, there's a woman in Portland whose name is Rosemary, Rosemary Lapham [Rosemary Lapham Berleman ‘48] was her maiden name, and she and her brother both went to Reed. And she was there in the forties, when these wonderful ladies were there. She could tell you more about them. I don't know where she is exactly, but she's in Portland somewhere, and I forget which one of her husbands' names she is now using. I think Berleman. She was in on that. Anyhow, there was one other semi-political occasion that took place in either '46 or '47. There was a guy, a veteran, who was called Tom Kelly [Thomas Darrell Kelly ‘48]. He was a great big guy, but he had been sort of shattered, his

nerves had been shattered in some wild outpost somewhere during the war, but not much. Anyway, one night he was down there waiting for the bus near the corner of 36th and Woodstock, and he was standing there under the streetlight reading Shelley, of all things, and these policemen came around and said he couldn't do that, and they hassled him and then they arrested him, I think. Anyway, all that noise came out. So the next night, a whole bunch of us went down there and stood on a corner and read poetry under the streetlight to see what the police would do, and, of course, the police didn't do anything. But everybody protested.

Sheehy: That was in '47?

Whalen: '46 or '47, somewhere around there. Anyway, just a blip that takes place.

Sheehy: Do you recall were there any political pranksters on campus?

Whalen: Well, there was Dick Meigs with his candle on his helmet, but he was downtown. No, I can't. I can't remember. The big prank was about who has the Doyle owl.

Sheehy: Yes. That was going on then, too?

Whalen: Oh, yes. It had been going on, I guess, ever since the place started or ever since there was an owl. Anyway, that was—I can't remember a whole bunch of stuff. There was a time when we used to go up to the corner of--you had to go across the gulch and up to the next street, Bybee and something. Whatever, and there was a bar there called the Milbee for where Milwaukie and Bybee streets cross. So anyway, we'd go there sometimes and have a beer. I don't think I was with them at the time. I was too broke to be there or something like that, but anyway, there was a black girl drinking there and they threw her out, and there was a great deal of demonstration and talking about that. So everybody took their trade elsewhere because in the opposite direction up Woodstock Street—I forgot what the cross street was—there was a place called—it was always called Old Bill's, I don't know why, and it was a beer joint. At any rate, that was sort of a political incident. I heard about it some later that Moshe Lenske [‘50] was involved in [that] taking place in the last few years.

Sheehy: Moshe Lenske?

Whalen: Yes. He stays in pretty close touch. He will call me up from time to time.

Sheehy: Do you remember much about your thesis experience?

Whalen: It was fun because I was going to do this book of poems, and it was based on the calendar, which was what Robert Graves' book *The White Goddess* had a great deal to

do with, and I took him on sort of also as a theory of poetry. Then there was another book that came out a few years later called *The Theory of Poetry*, written also by college professors, which was totally K-Mart, whereas Graves tried to look at the poetic tradition, starting with the most primitive times and going through Greek mythologies and early European mythologies and all about how there was this ancient religion, which was a fertility cult, for all intents and purposes, and that the world and whatnot were in the hands of this great goddess, who saw to it that the rain fell and the grain grew and that the animals reproduced and folks had made some progeny and so on. Then later, this religious system was supplanted by the Zeus business about the father being the big wheel and all these subordinate gods and goddesses. Then he kept getting to these disgraceful numbers about falling in love with Leda and various other ladies outside of Heaven, making Hera jealous, and other gods were cutting up, and it all fell apart. Whereas the sort of underground, for centuries, godless religion remained, and then, of course, it later on became called witchcraft, cult-fertility ceremonies and whatnot.

At any rate, he had these poems about how the calendar of the year, all the months of the calendar, had the letters of the alphabet attached, the arrangement of the alphabet, the history of the alphabet, the secret ceremonial alphabet, the meanings of letters and so on. It was quite marvelous—layout met with time and space and so on. So anyway, I thought that that would be a great scaffolding to hang myself on. [Laughter] So I tried to write thirteen poems with an introduction about notes and style of the calendar, and Lloyd said it was okay with him. So that what was nice about it was that every day I tried to write something, and I was able to, as I was saying, have some space out in the tower at

the library, which was a real great feeling to be up there where nobody else was allowed. It was a good time.

Sheehy: Not very spacious at the time was it?

Whalen: It wasn't very. So anyway, I worked. It was interesting to try to write everyday, and have that time set aside for nothing but that. So I wrote fair amount. That was interesting. Sally Allen was the one who typed it for me. She was making a job for herself typing theses. It had to be on 35 lb. bonded paper and whatnot. At any rate, finally it all got done, and signed, and then the big deal was having this oral examination, and that was very strange, because the committee was Donald Layman, of all people, and, I think, maybe Dorothy Johansen [history professor, 1934-1984], I forget, and several other professors. Of course, Donald Layman says, "Who else was concerned about Roman poetry and the Roman calendar?", and I couldn't answer him. [Laughter]

Everything else was okay. Anyway, that was nice. Then there was the grand graduation scene, and my father and his second wife—my mother was long dead by that time—he and his wife and my mother's older sister and her husband all came down to see this graduation, and it was very satisfying. I'd finished the goddamned thing and was able to get out of it, because I had known many people who couldn't get out of there no matter what, parading in caps and gowns and marching in the academic procession to the tune of [unclear]. Herb Gladstone [music professor, 1946-1980] was the professor who picked that out. He was a very funny man.

Sheehy: You mentioned that a number of people you knew had trouble finishing Reed and I imagine getting out of Portland. What was it like for you? You graduated as an older student at that point.

Whalen: Yes, I'll say. So anyway, that summer I got a job with the Bureau of Public Roads, and they were relocating a road up in the mountains by—I forgot the name of that dam that's up there. It's not too far away from Mount St. Helens. And at some point I fell down and wrecked my knee. So I had to quit, and I came back down to Portland. In another couple of months I was able to--when I'd collected all the money that was owed me, I came to San Francisco, probably in September of 1952. That was that. I was very happy to get out, get out of that rain, that stuff that hung around up there even if it wasn't raining. Depressing. Depressing my little spirits that were so delicate at the time. Anyhow, I was out here and saw some old Reed friends that were here, and then I was in touch with a guy I had known in the Army, he was down in Southern California and said, "Come and see us."

So I went down, I hitchhiked down to L.A., and, oh, it was even more wonderful than I remembered it being when I was in the Army. So he and I both got jobs at the North American Aircraft plant out on National Boulevard, found a place to live in Venice. And then it seems like I came back up to San Francisco for a while, and I came back to Los Angeles for a while, and then back in San Francisco a while. I was broke. I finally got a job at the U.C. Extension up there. I had to teach this poetry seminar, which

later on, when I left Lew Welch had it after I did. At any rate, so I had picked up several odd jobs. When I would apply for jobs, everybody would say, "Oh, you've had too much education."

It was hard to find work. So, at one point, Gary got a letter from Brian Shekeloff. He had gone off [to Japan]—he had come back in '64. He came back because he and Joanne were getting a divorce. He got this letter from Brian saying Kyoto YMCA School, where they had both been working, needed people, and would anybody want to come. The school could guarantee them a visa and a small sum. I said, "Write him back. Tell him to sign me up. I can't make it here."

So Ginsberg arranged a grant-in-aid from the American Academy of Literature or something.

Sheehy: American Academy of Arts and Sciences?

Whalen: Yes. And then also by a kind of fluke, trying to—Kenneth Rexroth was doing this TV series about American poetry, and he got me signed up on that, to be one of the people that they photographed reading and walking around San Francisco. So I got three hundred dollars out of that, and I got a thousand dollars from the academy, and so I was able to get on a boat and go to Japan to do this job. It was very interesting. I stayed with Gary when I first got there. He showed me the ropes around Kyoto. So Brian and his wife [found] for me to rent a beautiful, studio apartment in a big Japanese house.

Sheehy: On these travels, did you find any value to your Reed education—were you able to apply it to your interest in Buddhism or poetry going forward?

Whalen: Well, the interest in poetry continued anyway, and then it got a great boost when Gary and I met Alan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac in 1955, and they helped us in various ways, and also, later, a friend, Elsa Dorfman, who was working for Grove Press, set up a reading tour. But anyway, you know, we had a big reading here in 1955 where Ginsberg read "Howl," and things sort of went upward from there. Donald Allen decided to publish a bunch of poems in a collection of a second issue of *Evergreeen Review* with a picture on the cover of San Francisco poets, and so everything ascended from that point. But the thing is that if I hadn't known Gary, nothing would have happened, I don't think. He was the one that always was able to connect everything and figure everything out.

Sheehy: So that's a key value for you, your friendship with Gary Snyder.

Whalen: Yes. Well, and then also Lew Welch, who was always doing poetry, continued writing. He'd had a lot of trouble with his first marriage in Chicago and came back out here, still kept writing and going through all kinds of changes. He still kept writing. And then in the background were Charles Leong, who would pop into town sometimes and then whatever—on our way to work in the Forest Service, we would stop off at the college. It's interesting to see all the changes that went on the campus, all the buildings, how it all became cluttered with architecture.

Sheehy: Have you been back recently?

Whalen: No. I understand from Moshe Lenske that there is this idea of a uniform Tudor facade or something where everything is--.

Sheehy: Everything is brick. [Laughter]

Whalen: It's all right. I think it's too bad that they cluttered up the spaces and now it's all cluttered. The Student Union Building they had was a disaster in terms of architecture. So I understand it's being replaced or something.

Sheehy: It's been rebuilt. Bricked over. Seriously. [Laughter] You've done a wonderful job here. Is there anything about Reed that you'd like to add?

Whalen: Well, I'm sorry. I hope that what I say won't be taken as ill-natured, but it seems that when I was there, there were fairly distinguished faculty members, and as far as I know right now, I can't think of anyone who is teaching up there whose work or whose anything, anything at all that approaches where it was at in 1946. I'm sorry to say that, because I don't really know. I haven't been around the place. All I know is that I haven't seen any productions to make me think differently. The system as it used to be, that is, that lecture and conference system, was interesting. It seemed to work. It seemed to

encourage people to go out and learn, to go and take out stuff out of the library, get interested in some topic and run it through and see what you could come up with. That's valuable experience, and to get you to settle in and concentrate on various subjects and do them, not be clowning around too much, try to work. It's very hard for us to work, I think, especially with books. Of course, as I say, I grew up to be a bookish-type individual, so it was very pleasant for me to spend a lot of time in the library reading, reading, for example, they had a whole set of the works of Dr. Samuel Johnson, or to read all of other authors from start to finish, and, as I was saying, to read scientific reports from the various foundations that would show up in the cage down in the library. So, all of that is to the good. The thing is that you have to see that you were free to use all that to find out, to see what is real, and again to fall back on my high school readings about how much of it is real and how much of it is nonsense and propaganda, what is history, what is politics, what is science, and what's going on, who's in charge. And, of course, what does it all mean. [Laughter]

Sheehy: Did Reed help you with that question?

Whalen: What does it all mean? Yes, to the extent that I was able to read—I had read a great deal of stuff before I ever came there, so I didn't have to reread Plato or Aristotle or that stuff. I already knew it and had an opinion about it. So what I had to do was to work on what I was going to need as a writer, I think, and what all of us need as writers is vocabulary. And where you get vocabulary is from reading, reading English, English and

American writing, but particularly English writing. A friend of mine was doing his thesis on an Elizabethan playwright called Cyril Turner, a rather obscure one who was written about by T. S. Eliot, and I got interested in all these funny Elizabethan playwrights. Their language was this great, wild swirl of words. And also in 17th and 18th century prose, more wonderful words to play with and see what you could do with. That was something that I certainly could use, the experience of reading, of accumulating. By accumulating I don't mean the story of, or only the news of, the language, but how we got that stuff, how we got American language as well. William Carlos Williams was really concerned about this. It boiled down to us as what is colloquial. Dr. Williams had written this book called *In the American Grain* in which he sort of sets up what are the solid blocks of the American—I think it's "mistake," sorry [laughter]. I think our real background to the wild, wild, wild slick-- Melville and Whitman and Emily Dickinson, who was a real wild case. And then Hemingway and Faulkner, particularly Faulkner. Using words, vocabulary, and the geographical sense all of those people had. All of that is the meat and potatoes to write with. Of course with any luck at all we have some ideas, we have some feelings that we can convey through those words. So there you are.

Sheehy: Thank you. This has been wonderful.

Whalen: [Laughter] Everything is wonderful.