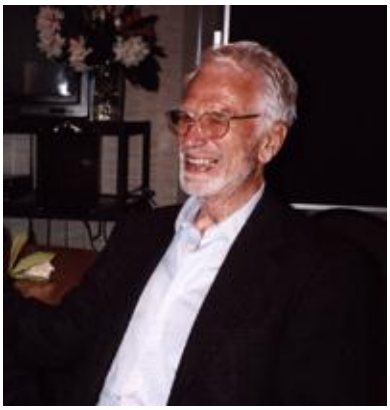

SI: Today is April 30th 2003, we are talking with Mr. Fred Bassetti, architect for many of Western's buildings. The interviewer is Steve Inge [accompanied by Tamara Belts].

Mr. Bassetti, thank you for taking the time to talk today. Can you tell us a little bit about your life, your education and how you and Western came together?

FB: Well I'm a country boy, sort of; I was born in Seattle but when I was one year old the family moved to a little place called Foster about ten miles south of Seattle. Now it has been engulfed by the bigger town of Tukwila [but it] was just a little neighboring town when I was a child. Growing up out in the countryside was wonderful. It was sparsely settled, a typical country area. We lived a carefree existence there [and I] went to Foster Grade School and Foster High School for most of my primary education.

Although when I was fifteen my father…

Oh, I should say that my father was an immigrant from Turin [Torino], Italy, and my mother was an immigrant from a little town, Forde, north of Bergen, Norway. So I'm a real typical American hybrid. They met in Seattle and he pursued a career of running the local Italian colony newspaper, the Gazetta Italiana—the Italian Gazette—which he published til his death (although he did some other papers toward the end of his life too).

At any rate, my upbringing was pretty typical for an American. I was born in 1917 before the end of the first World War.

Oh, the thing I was going to mention that was a little different, was the fact that my father decided when I was fifteen that I should get a little education—since he felt we were living in the land of barbarians. (I think we were the only family around the area who had a little library. My father had taken a closet, enlarged it and made an excuse of a library out of that.)

When I was fifteen at any rate, my father sent me to Italy to stay with his mother in Turin. He decided I should learn the language if I could, so he put me on an Italian freighter boat in Vancouver B.C. I was ostensibly a member of the crew although all I did was type up the ship's newspaper for the thirty passengers or so. That was in 1932. There were a few passengers and I would get the news from the man in the radio shack on the ship and type up a few copies for the passengers.

Then I was thrown into life in Turin, Italy, which is in northwestern Italy, where my grandmother who was then seventy-three was living. She was widowed when my father was about six years old and he had long since left to seek his fortune in the world. At any rate, it was a healthy experience, culturally as much as anything else because I was thrown into school with Italian kids, none of whom spoke English. And I of course spoke no Italian because my mother not being Italian, no Italian was spoken at home—nor was any Norwegian. But I learned fast as kids do and came back almost a year later on another freighter going through the Mediterranean, stopping at all the little ports -- Canary Islands, Panama Canal, West Coast of Central America, Mexico and up to Vancouver B.C. where they picked me up. Found their boy's voice had cracked and he was almost a man by then—he wasn't the child anymore.

We soon moved into Seattle and lived in the Denny-Blaine area where I went to Garfield for the remaining two years of high school. And as most kids around Seattle did, I went to the University of Washington for my Bachelor's degree. I started in engineering, but about halfway through the first year decided that architecture would be better and shifted to that, much to my father's dismay. Since it was right in the middle of the Depression, 1936, he saw that five years of architecture after a year of engineering made six years all together, instead of the four that engineering would have taken. So he had to pay thirty dollars a quarter for six years instead of four. Well, thirty dollars doesn't seem like much now, but it was a lot in the Depression, probably about twenty-five or thirty times the value now. At any rate I finished architecture at Washington in 1942, just after the Pearl Harbor attack and start of WWII for the US.

Then I worked during the war for the government. I was 4F, so didn't have to go as a soldier. I had a health problem and worked for the government, helping design and get housing built for the workers who came to the Pacific Coast to build airplanes and ships during the Second World War.

Then, about the end of the war, [I went] to Harvard, where I studied under Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. First job after graduation, I worked for a time for a famous architect from Finland named Alvar Aalto; one the great architects of the world. Gropius and Breuer were very well known and so was Aalto. After a few months there and working for another architect for a brief time in Boston, I came back to Seattle. I had married just before going to Harvard and when we came back to Seattle I went to work for NBBJ [Naramore, Bain, Brady & Johanson] which is the biggest firm in Seattle and one of the biggest in the world as a matter of fact, probably the first or second largest architectural firm in the United States now. And they were quite large then, although not that big.

While working there (this was toward the end of 1946), I was always doing architectural competitions at night, so I would fall asleep over my desk and the next day at the office somebody in the middle of the morning would have to poke me to wake me up. I won a competition for a small house design in Seattle which was sponsored by the Seattle Times and the American Institute of Architects—a small house then meant about nine hundred square feet, that was the limit. You couldn't make it larger then because houses were in great scarcity after the Second World War.

Seattle had had this influx of population, but people were building, you know—a normal house was considered fine [at] under a thousand square feet. At any rate, since the competition had been sponsored by the Seattle Times, the largest paper in Seattle, they put my picture on the front page as the winner. Well that brought in a little work, even though I was working for NBBJ.

As a matter of fact, we didn't even have a telephone in our apartment because telephones were hard to come by at the end of the war. But two people who read the story called my mother and father's place and asked if they could speak to me. She gave me their numbers so I called them back and thus had two clients to do houses for. I went up to my boss Perry Johanson and told him I had some work of my own and really wanted to start my own office. So after two months, I left and went across the street to a young architect friend's office, John N. Morse. He had one room in

a little old fashioned office building that's no longer standing and I asked if I could rent — a drafting board in his office. He said sure, twenty-five bucks a month, and that's the way the Bassetti office started. Well, it started with little promise. Actually within a month or two—we had decided that he and I would join forces under the name of Bassetti and Morse which was the first of our firm names. He said, "Well you've got the fame because you won this competition, your name has public familiarity, we'll put it first."

That's why it turned out that way. At any rate we started. He had pictures on the wall of houses but it turned out he hadn't actually built any yet. He had a couple of designs to do, and we thought we'd be stronger working together than separately.

Well, a month later my first client died. It was Bill Moshier—he was a disc jockey, and a disc jockey in those days was the same as a TV anchorman today. They told the news, and were the most prominent broadcast personalities in town at the time. Then my second client a few weeks later called; he had wanted me to design a vacation house for him out at Bothell, and he said, "Well, prices are awfully high, I think I'm going to wait until prices come down." Prices were about five dollars a square foot then, for a house. At any rate, prices of course never came down, and he never built, so within six weeks I was out of work entirely, and I struggled. My wife was teaching at the University of Washington as an interior designer, and she got three-hundred dollars a month, I think, salary, so we lived on that. It was a financial struggle.

I tried to find work anyway I could—designing kitchens, remodeling French doors and porches and anything I could find. I think we made seven-hundred dollars each the first year and maybe twice that the next year. So it was pretty slim pickings. But I remember—I don't know why I had the courage to do it, but I went into a bank to borrow a hundred dollars to tide me over. I thought I might find some client (oh, I must have had some little job to do, but not a complete house). I asked for somebody to speak to, and this man came to the counter, a man named John Henry, he was an assistant cashier. I remember he asked "Well how much do you want to borrow?" And I blurted out, "Two-hundred dollars!"

So he loaned me two-hundred dollars on my signature, even though I had no assets to speak of. But he was sort of smart to throw an anchor to windward—he came marching into the office a couple weeks later and asked me to design his new house, which was pretty wise because then I would have at least one client and his loan would be secured. So the Jack Henry house became my first ever actual house that was built. It was about 1,400 sq. feet over in Bellevue, cost $14,000 and I was off and running. Many houses followed.

One of the best clients was Marshall Forrest and his wife Ernestine. They had bought a lot on Chuckanut Drive (the first lot as you enter Bellingham, right at the sign that says you're entering Bellingham). Their lot was on the hill right above Chuckanut Drive. I had a lawyer friend in Seattle named Jack Harlow who was a friend of Marshall's. At any rate, he suggested to Marshall that he hire me for his new house. They invited us up to dinner to meet them, and they engaged us, Bassetti and Morse, as architects. That house became my first national AIA honor award. It's a very severe house, flat roof, in the early modern tradition, although I'm still proud of it in some ways. It actually begins to show a little human quality. The early modern work generally was not very personable or humane you might say. But I remember in the living room I designed a curved stone fireplace. There's just a curved wall that goes down like an "L" or like a letter "J" on its side, and there was a hood to capture the smoke and draw it away, in the crook of the stone wall, and that became the fireplace. But that curve, so uncharacteristic of early modern architecture gave it a little bit of humanity. They were great clients, very supportive and that's how I met Marshall. That was 1952 probably ('51 or '52). Then I think the Forrests introduced us to Dr. Fouts [John D. Fouts 503 Fieldstone Rd.] for whom we did another house over in the area just northwest of where Marshall and Ernestine lived.

SI: Over in Edgemoor.

FB: Edgemoor maybe. It's another severe modern house over there. Now as I look back on them, I think they're so rigid. Of course this was my Harvard training, Gropius's work was like that. Breuer was a better designer, his work was more fluid with more heart to it. At any rate, that was my beginning and how I was introduced to somebody who eventually became a [Western] trustee and convinced the Board that they should have us to do one of the college buildings.

In this early period, I was just designing houses, mostly in Seattle. We did a public project, I think it was fifty or maybe it was a hundred houses or apartments in Kennewick, near Pasco. I did houses for some members of the Board of Trustees there; they invited me over to do their houses, and some others in Seattle. I gradually became known and as the Forrest house won both the State of Washington and National Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects, the word got around and other people came into the office.

Then, about 1957 it must have been, I got a call from Western Washington College of Education (as it was known at that time), to consider doing a building for the student organization. Barney Goltz told me last week, the reason I was selected is a little bit unusual, in that they had already engaged a firm from Seattle which had done other work on campus. (It was the successor firm to Bebb and Gould which had done the original library building.)

TB: Jones and Bindon.

FB: Yes, Jones and Bindon! Then it became Bindon and Wright. Yes, Jones and Bindon I think it was—Leonard Bindon and John Paul Jones—who was still living at that time. Very nice guy, I remember I worked briefly for him during the war too.

At any rate, this other firm had been engaged to do the student union building and they had done preliminaries, presented them to the College, and apparently proceeded to work on construction documents. In the meantime the College had hired Barney Goltz to be their officer in charge of student affairs. I'm not sure what his exact title was then. And Barney began by looking at the drawings for the student union building, which was the Viking Union Building. But he was not satisfied with the organization of the plan or something, so he called the architects and asked them to make some changes. But apparently they felt that they were so far along on construction documents that they should not make changes, that it was too late.

By this time the Board of Trustees had been changed and the new Governor had apparently decided, or the Legislature at the Governor's suggestion had decided to raise the number of trustees in each of the colleges from three to five. I guess there's probably a difficulty getting a quorum sometimes when there's such a small number. At any rate they raised the number and the Governor was therefore able to select two new members to the board as well as one re-appointed member. That's how Marshall Forrest came to be on the Board, as well as Joe Pemberton and Dave Sprague, an insurance agent from Seattle. Marshall is a lawyer.

At any rate, when they heard from Barney Goltz and the President (I guess Dr. Haggard then), that the architects were not willing or were reluctant to change the drawings; they decided, well that's not the way to work with the College, and apparently cancelled the appointment of that firm. Marshall must have submitted my name or Dave Sprague, I knew both of them; I didn't know Joe Pemberton at the time. At any rate they submitted my name to the rest of the trustees, and they selected us, so that's how I came to be architect of the Viking Union Building. Of course it was a great opportunity for me; it was probably my first building of any consequence.

Most architects start out doing residential work, but after a number of houses you'd like to do something more significant—although I continued to do houses for many years, even until maybe fifteen, twenty years ago, and it's a wonderful thing to do, because you can work intimately with somebody that way.

So we were off and running. As a matter of fact, our design for the student union building also won an AIA award; I believe from the Washington State chapter, or the Seattle chapter it may have been at that time.

Many other buildings came our way after that. Jack [Morse] and I worked together, but the way we divided the design responsibility was that whichever partner brought in the commission would start doing the designing, with advice from the other partner. Our practice grew and we began to do work at other colleges, Central Washington State College as well as the University of Washington. The practice expanded over many years.

Jack and I decided to split our practice into two separate, individual firms after fifteen years of practice. We had a small disagreement which seems inconsequential from this point of view. With the advantage of time, we probably never should have separated, but he continued with a distinguished career and so did I—as separate firms. Then later of course the College seemed to be pleased with our work and we did other work here.

I don't have my documents in hand to refer to, because they're locked in the trunk of my car where I set my keys before slamming the lid. I could have a little better judgment of time if I had those documents. At any rate, we did an addition to the Carver Gymnasium which was pretty much a utilitarian structure. It was a good structure and I think served the College well, but aesthetically I was never too pleased with the result. As a result of that I have never [felt] that that particular building contributed much to the campus.

I like to think that in all our work here as well as in other campuses and other venues, particularly in the city, that we plan and design and do the site planning of our buildings in as thoughtful a manner as possible—to improve the environment, the locality where it is. We like to think that we're respectful of other buildings next to us and nearby. We hope that our buildings are made for people and not just for the outward look. We like to do the planning of the building as well as the site so that it makes an inviting place.

There's an example in Seattle under construction right now—the large public library [Central Library, 1000 4th Avenue]. The [library] Board considered architects from all over the world and invited a few of them to come to lecture and submit to the public, as well as the Board, evidence of what they've done at other places and other times and make suggestions about how they feel about the particular problem there. They selected an architect [Rem Koolhaas] from the Netherlands, who is teaching at Harvard also — a famous architect—more famous perhaps at the beginning for his writing. He is, I think, a former newsman or at any rate he was in the field of literature and reporting. He did a book called the *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* [1978] about twenty years ago that was well regarded, at least famous, and he has since done many works of architectural criticism, as well as having done several buildings. Charismatic man!

At any rate the building he designed now is under construction in Seattle, about halfway done. The budget I think is around a hundred million for the building construction and I suspect it's going to cost fifty million dollars or more beyond what was budgeted, because of its eccentric form. But the point I want to make is that the building seems to me—it's only partially done of course, but you can get a good of idea how it's going to turn out—essentially an unfriendly, hostile building, exactly the opposite of what we should be doing. We are designing for people. We are designing for populated areas—whether it's a city downtown area or a college. It would seem that we should be as friendly as possible and have a building invite the public to come in with welcoming arms, rather than be

standoffish. This one has steel coming down on a slope, on about a forty-five degree slope, right to the sidewalk on the 5th Avenue side, which is one of the main streets in Seattle. You walk by and there's nothing but this heavy iron grill on a diagonal pattern—very menacing—coming right down to the sidewalk. There's a small opening cut in one end of it there, I don't know whether people are going to be able to walk through that or cars come through for something. I don't understand it, on all sides it's unfriendly.

At any rate, I shouldn't refer to others, but it seems a contradiction of what we're trying to do and what we hoped to do at the Viking Union, the Library, the Humanities classroom and office [building] that is there now, and Ridgeway dormitories. Each one was the best effort we could make to be friendly to people, to welcome them as much as possible. A particular example of trying to make it fit in was when we were selected to do the addition to Mabel Zoe Wilson Library. This must have been about 1964 something like that, in the early to mid '60s. That's forty years ago now. The original library was designed by Bebb and Gould, architects from Seattle. It's a wonderful, of course derivative Renaissance style, which doesn't have much meaning for the rest of the world outside of classical countries, and yet it was done with consummate skill and impeccable taste. Lovely proportions, fine materials, the reading room in particular. The whole building on the upper floor is a grand room—inviting contemplation, calm, and study. I think it's a prime environment, beautifully done for students, especially on a relatively small college campus.

Western Washington University has grown wonderfully over the years from a small normal school to a major public university. You can no longer look at it as a small isolated institution because it's become a significant factor in the education of the state and the region.

At any rate, the original building was a fine example of thoughtful architecture, even though it wasn't in the forefront, the cutting edge of new architectural thought. But one certainly has to respect it for its dignity and the care that went into its design, and also the care that the University has given to it over the years in maintaining it and keeping it as a fine center of campus life. I've been attracted to libraries all my life and used them always, everywhere. So I welcomed no job more than the design of the library up here even though it was just an addition. But the thing we were confronted with was the fact that the building had been added on to in the early '60s, with two wings on the north and south ends.

Does it go north and south or is that a little bit cockeyed?

SI: East and West.

FB: East and West. At any rate, two substantial wings on each end of the old building, but they didn't harmonize with the old building at all; it seemed to me a great misfortune that they were so antithetical to the beautiful design of the original building. You know I can sympathize with a modern architect; [this] architect was what we would call a modern architect because he took nothing from the past and struck out. But it was a bit harsh in comparison to the old building. They were square blocks, cubical, almost a cube in proportion on each end, with narrow vertical windows and an absolutely flat concrete roof. It seemed to me they did not relate well. Perhaps we had a little too much hubris in what we did, but in adding on we wrapped the new building around those wings and redesigned the walls so they were somewhat in proportion and in character with the old original building. We didn't use arches because those grand old arches were appropriate to the old Renaissance design. But we did use smaller windows and tried to design the outward aspect of our addition so that it would relate to the old building and be a calm thing, in harmony not only with the old building but also with Old Main, and the Humanities classroom and office [building], which was an earlier building we had designed east of the library.

The Humanities [Building] was a different thing entirely. It was designed as a three story building with the classrooms on the ground level and two floors of offices above that. They were designed also to be congenial to the people using them, the professors upstairs as well as the students using the classrooms on the ground level. The classrooms on the ground level are immediately accessible to the students from the outside as well as the professors who can come down [on the inside] from their offices above. There are several different sizes [of rooms] to accommodate different kinds of classes that use the space, and the offices above are scattered around the building on the outside wall.

They're also designed in quite a different fashion from the typical offices. They're all of different sizes. There's a change of size from the smallest to the largest, very small ones for the assistant professors or instructors, to some larger ones and corner ones, for the department head and tenured professor—so that there's something to look forward to as you rise through the ranks!

We put carpeting in, instead of asphalt tile which was typical, hoping that it would absorb sound and contribute to the studio—small study—atmosphere that a scholar would tend to like. The corridors run on the diagonal down as the offices change in size. The corridor follows that change and you go around corners in a rather gentle way rather then a sharp right angle corner, everything being done to make people comfortable and feel at home.

SI: [Do you recall Jarrett's making some suggestions regarding the lighting in the offices of the Humanities Building?]

FB: No I don't actually. Jarrett was fine, a very good man, smart as a whip. I don't remember any particular suggestions though he may have had.

SI: [He recalled asking for something other than overhead lighting in the offices, and you did come up with a design for a lamp that came down from the ceiling and hung over the desk, which he was quite pleased with].

FB: I see—I'd forgotten that, maybe I did do that.

SI: It was probably the only building that [he felt he had the opportunity to contribute to], so it was more meaningful to him, perhaps.

FB: A great suggestion if he made it, yes. I would certainly have welcomed it.

At any rate so that was the Humanities [Building] which was situated over toward Old Main. We had that whole grassy area between Old Main, the Campus School, and Carver Gymnasium. It was a big grassy sward there. In prehistoric times, there was apparently a lake there and the underground was filled with peat moss. We kept the building as far over toward Old Main as we could, which meant that later on when George Bartholick and Ibsen Nelsen—two very good architects—worked on campus, there was a large open space left [and] they could put Red Square there. We were also asked about that time—actually I think it was before—to do the Ridgeway dormitories (Ridgeway dormitories began before the Mabel Zoe Wilson Library addition).

I remember when we were given the commission [for the dormitories] the Board and the Administration—Barney Goltz particularly and I think Jim Jarrett was still there [as President]—suggested that maybe the dorms should use the south end of the play fields, where it was flat land that would be easy and economical to build on.

I walked down there from the center of the campus one afternoon—nice sunny afternoon. But instead of going on the flat land below the hill, I decided to walk along the hillside, that steep hillside below Highland Drive. As I walked through the woods I found an old logging road that went through there, at least a little flat walkway on the hillside which made it easier for students to walk, rather then scrambling on the steep slope in between the trees. As I walked through it, I marveled at the wonderful second growth conifers and quite a few deciduous trees as well, and came to a beautiful outcropping of rock along the way, and walked on down to the south end—to the flat area beyond—which seemed awfully dull. So before starting the study of Ridgeway dormitories on the flat area I decided to do some studies on the hillside. There was enough of a flat area at the top of the hill between the crest of the hill and Highland Drive that I thought we could get some buildings there (the dining hall and Phase II) and with some others stepping down the hill.

Phase I was for 400 students. Rather then make one big building, we decided it would be good to divide it into four buildings, putting a smaller numbers of students in each building. At any rate, we tried to see what we could do on the hill top and find out if it could be done within the budget. After making some investigation, we thought it probably could. This way the project would be nearer to the academic campus where most of their classes would be. Students would only have to walk half as far as they would from the flat area at the south of the athletic field. In addition, they would have this wonderful view from the hillside, among trees (instead of having to plant trees, which would take fifty years to grow as well). So that's what we did, and the Board decided to take a chance on it, saying that it could be done within the budget.

Fortunately when the bids came in, it was within the budget, and the first phase of Ridgeway was done.

There's another thing I might mention about the buildings themselves. Western was growing at a fast pace at the time in number of students, as it is now.

How many students are there?

SI: Above 12,000.

FB: Over 12,000 students now and there were probably only 2,000 then or something like that.

At any rate, it's freshmen and sophomores that are mostly the ones who live in the dormitories. Later when they get to be juniors and seniors they tend to move off campus and live in houses, rented houses or some other way. But since I remembered my own experience as a freshman in college, kind of lost and wandering around, and not having many friends, and thinking (the University of Washington had 10,000 students) it was awfully big. It seemed to me that we should break down the layout of the buildings as much as possible.

In each building (Phase I) there are a hundred students (in each separate building) which was the first breakdown. That we of course broke down into two or three floors, which made about forty or fifty kids on each floor. Then as we laid out the building itself, the entrance was in the center (although there were secondary entrances from the ends as well). You would come into a building and the lounge would be in the middle (there would be a lounge on each floor usually, or smaller one on the lower floors perhaps). Then on each side of the center, would be a corridor which stepped down because of the hillside (these were long narrow buildings, at least the main ones at the top were). The corridor had rooms on either side, after three or four rooms we would step down again and maybe jog a little bit, and as you jog in plan, and go downhill a bit, it fits the hill again. Each student is in a group then of six or eight or ten, twelve students, and there's a bathroom. These were single sex dormitories (nowadays they're probably unisex).

But at any rate, the kids would meet in the bathrooms and get acquainted more intimately with each one in their little section. Then they would meet the ones next door as they went out the building, or meet in the lounge. There would be a gradual hierarchy of kids from the small group of three or four rooms together, to the wing, to the whole floor, to the building—as Alpha and Gamma—then to the whole Ridgeway complex and then the whole College. There was a break down of steps to assist in getting acquainted and not feeling so isolated. That was the reason for the layout, and that plan reflected itself in the design of the outside of the building too, and the complex as a whole. The buildings on the top and bottom, and the ones going up and down the hill, are kind of steps down. This was the design of Ridgeway I and II. The dining hall of course was part of the second phase. Then the third phase was a different one.

I remember when we first came here to do Ridgeway, I've forgotten who was in charge of housing, maybe Bill McDonald [Dean of Men] had something to do with it, [and Lorraine Powers, Dean of Women]. At any rate, they said, "We've had experience with those concrete dormitories up on Highland Drive which have outdoor corridors all the way around them. We don't want outside corridors anymore because the boys can sneak into the girl's rooms too easily and we can't supervise it all."

This was back in the '60s of course, and they still had to be in at 10 o'clock or something I guess. At any rate (laughter), they didn't want outside corridors, so we designed the Ridgeway buildings with inside corridors so the students could be supervised a little better. I think a professor had a room in the corner of each of those buildings, or some instructor had to live there. I don't suppose that continues.

At any rate, by the time the third phase came along, Ridgeway III, they'd decided they wanted more freedom and not so much supervision. They said, "Well, you know we can go back to outside access again."

Ridgeway III has these outside stairways. You come up in these kinds of blocks of houses, each one with four rooms around a central bathroom on each level. There are two students in each room. There were a few singles (I can't remember how they were distributed). But there were usually two kids to a room, eight kids to each bathroom, each little group, again this breakdown in scale of hierarchy. The reason the buildings look so different, Ridgeway III from Ridgeway I and II is the fact that they have this stair access to these rooms. So that's the history of Ridgeway, the Humanities Building, the Library, the Student Union and Carver Gym. That's about it …

SI: Bookstore.

FB: Oh, the bookstore of course. Next to one of our early projects (the Viking Union) was the bookstore. It's a little building adjacent to the Viking Union done in a similar brick manner. One thing that's distinctive about it is the banding of brick. We had specified a brick that I like very much that comes from Hebron, South Dakota, a little town where they have very fine clay. Their common brick is of such fine clay that it's better quality than our face brick in this part of the country. Very dense, you douse it in water and it doesn't absorb it, so it's very good in the cold wet climate; softer bricks get wet and then freeze in winter and crack. We specified that on the original Viking Union building and the same thing on the outside of the bookstore. We specified a collection that they called Red/Brown Mingle. The nature of the clay and the way it's fired is such that the bricks come in five different colors, very closely related, a close harmony of reds and browns, and a little bit of yellow mixed in. This is partly because of the way they made them. They have beehive kilns there that were filled with stacked bricks and fired. But in a beehive kiln, the fire's hottest in the center and cooler around the outside so the bricks get fired at different temperatures. They all get fired, but some of them are hotter and burned a little darker then the others. The outside ones are a little orange and they get a little redder and browner toward the center.

SI: And that can be achieved out of the same batch of clay?

FB: That's all the same batch of clay, yes. Very fine clay, but of course the clay varies a little bit too, but not much.

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FB: So we had this Red/Brown Mingle which had five different shades of red, brown or orange. I suggested to the masons that they pick out bricks and maybe pick out the darker ones and put them in one course, so that this brick would be a little darker along this line, and a little lighter along the next one—not to do it slavishly, not make all the things the same—but just gradually pick them out and make a little selection there in that pattern. Both the Viking Union and the Bookstore, in the brickwork—for the one who takes a good look—they have this striped appearance which is quite subtle but it's there, and may interest the eye a little more then if they were all the same.

SI: Kind of gives a clear line to a flat wall.

FB: Yes it does.

An interesting thing there also, Paul Thiry, the architect for the library addition (those first two cubical wings), and that concrete dormitory up on Highland Drive (whose architecture was quite severe at the time), admired brick used in that way. Many years later he was commissioned to do a Greek Orthodox Church on Boyer Avenue in Seattle. He decided to use brick (although I don't know if he used Hebron brick or not). It looks quite nice. But he carried that a step beyond what we did. He designed it so that the rows would be all dark or light all the way along. It's a very long wall around the main part of the church as well as extending on each side, and some of the brick up the side of the building itself in addition to the wall is striped. But much more distinctive then the way I did it. Mine is so subtle you wouldn't notice it unless you look for it. But this building you notice it without having to try, and it's quite handsome. I think maybe I was too cautious and subdued in using that striped effect.

But that's about all I can remember. I remember the different Presidents a little bit. We all mark time in a different way whether by where we went to school, where we've lived, who the President of the United States is, or by who's the President of the University. I remember Dr. Haggard as a rather severe, courteous, reserved person. Then I remember Jim Jarrett who followed him—a brilliant man.

I remember particularly the inauguration of President Jarrett. There was a celebration for three days and he gave a wonderful speech, memorable speech, most eloquent. I remember he talked about hubris, the dangers of hubris. Then Harvey Bunke came and Jerry Flora and by that time we were gone.

At one time—as a matter of fact after we had done several campus buildings—Jim Jarrett asked me (it's interesting that about the same time we were doing a lot of buildings at Central Washington in Ellensburg, and the President there, whose name I forget asked me the same question), "Well Bassetti, you've done an awful lot of buildings here, but the Legislatures don't like it unless we spread the work a little bit, could you suggest some other architects to work here?"

So I was pleased to suggest some of the best architects that I knew—Henry Klein in Mt. Vernon, Ralph Anderson and Ibsen Nelsen in Seattle, Al Bumgardner. I remember I pretty much recommended the same list to each institution. And from then on Nelson, Bumgardner, Anderson, and Klein got all the work and I didn't have any more jobs at either of those colleges. But we did work at the University of Washington, at Washington State University at

Pullman and at many other places, including work in Lisbon, Portugal where we did the American Embassy and Consulate, and also did some schools in Samoa. We worked on many other buildings of course, but those are the college buildings and I don't know if you care to know about the others. But that's by and large the way my career has gone. Western is a great institution, my favorite of all of them.

SI: In the original design of Carver, was that intended to have a brick overlay on the outside?

FB: It was, and it was too expensive so it was eliminated in the bidding.

SI: A victim of a budget.

FB: Yes.

We tried something new there which didn't work out quite as well as I'd expected and I would do it differently now. But one of the things that we did to keep costs down (it was a very low budget as I remember) was to have the walls, which had to be quite high because of the basketball court, be what you call "tilt up." The concrete was poured on the ground with the reinforcing pre-set. After it was cured it was lifted up and put into place. It's very cheap, but it also may not be too good looking. So what we tried was something new—the concrete after it's poured, is leveled by a board. Two men go along on each end of this board and pull it across the whole massive concrete panel [while it's] on the ground, to level it. And I suggested, I think it was, some molds on the boards, that as you put it down, instead of pulling it, you'd do it in sections. But I noticed that as they lifted up the board it pulled a little of the top surface of the concrete with it, and it made interesting marks. I can't quite remember now how we accomplished that, to keep them in order, so they were not just haphazard. But at any rate, if you look at the building, there are these marks on the outside; we tried to give it a texture. It was only modestly successful however. It did give it a texture, but today I would do it a little differently and there are much more sophisticated ways of using concrete.

SI: But the option at that time would have been a flat slab wall on the outside …

FB: Yes.

SI: So not being able to do the brick, that was an alternative.

FB: Yes it was an alternative to the brick, which would have made the building harmonize with the rest of the campus much better.

SI: I had heard that the reason for the texture was that later an application of brick would adhere, that that would give it some texture for the mortar to hold on to.

FB: Oh. Actually that was not the reason, but that's an interesting point, it probably would have worked.
I should also mention the sculpture—the art program. I don't think we had any art allowance on the Viking Union. But several of us architects were active in the early years in trying to get an art budget and to have artists represented on campus or in buildings where we worked. I can't remember whether Ridgeway dormitories or the Humanities [Building] was the next project, but we did succeed in getting some money appropriated to engage artists to do work around the buildings. I remember on Ridgeway I we engaged Noel Osheroff from Los Angeles, who was a potter, to do some animals around the buildings in the woods there. And there was another artist on that building [Marian Melim]. On Humanities [Building], Norm Warsinske from Seattle did several bronze and steel pieces. Doug Bennett

did some graphics on the stairwell walls, one of them was a whole wall, I remember the word 'yes' in many different languages. There was a beautifully done calligraphy, the writing of the word "yes," "si," "oui," and so on.
SI: Because it was the language building.

FB: That's right; it was the language building as well. But unfortunately it turned out that one word, the word for "yes" in Czechoslovakian was a swear word in another language and the other language professor complained so the wall was painted out.

SI: Oh.

FB: A little bit prudish I am afraid. But at any rate, the wall is gone, but if that paint could be taken off the wall, the lettering may still be there. Anyway, we did hire artists where we could. And on Mabel Zoe Wilson Library we had a small budget, I think maybe $10,000, so I recommended Richard Beyer for a sculpture and he did that wonderful piece out on the lawn between Old Main and the library, which is *The Man Who Used to Hunt Cougars for Bounty.* There's a nice story that goes with that piece about the bounty hunter who used to go up in the mountains hunting cougar for bounty. He got old but his hounds still went up in the hills and bayed at the cougars while he stayed at home—couldn't go up there anymore. He sat on his porch with his bottle of booze. Finally the cougar ends up on his lap and they're drinking and singing *America the Beautiful* together.

At any rate, I also suggested that I do a piece myself so I did one of the few public pieces of sculpture I've done, which was a large cube of twelve logs, about eight feet long, of old growth redwood. I am ashamed of myself now for using old redwood. Of course it was there and it was being milled, so I guess it would have been milled anyway, but at any rate it was done in redwood.

[The cube] sits on one of its corners and encloses a bronze ball. There's a space inside these timbers, maybe two feet on the side, a cubic space. And I suspended a bronze ball in there made of [38] pieces, an Archimedean solid called a truncated cube, I believe. It has [38] facets and each facet has either a letter of the alphabet or one of the ten digits or the symbols for pi and infinity. This [timber] cube on the outside is about [eight] feet high. At the midpoint where these timbers come together in such a way that it leaves a hole at several different places about eye level, you can peer inside and then for any student that's curious enough, he/she looks inside and finds *oh, there's this bronze ball in there, what's that for?*They go around and notice the letters and the symbols and on the outside, on the end of one of the timbers I incised with a steel die the contents of an advertisement that was made for National Library Week many years ago, that I ran across by accident. I admired it so much; I cut this whole advertisement for libraries into the timber. What it is (and I've given a copy of it to the library for keeping and distribution because it's a wonderful thing)—there's a line of letters a to z, little tiny line, and the body of the thing says –

"Your library has these arranged in ways that make you cry, giggle, love, hate, wonder, ponder and understand.

It's astonishing what those twenty-six little marks can do. In Shakespeare's hands they became Hamlet. Mark Twain wound them into Huckleberry Finn, James Joyce twisted them into Ulysses. Gibbon pounded them into the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Milton shaped them into Paradise Lost. Einstein added some numbers and signs (to save time and space) and they formed the General Theory of Relativity.
Your name is in them. And here they are again, on the bronze ball inside.

Why? – To remind you of letters, words, sentences and paragraphs. In short, books – reading. You can live without books, of course. But it's so limiting.

How else can you go to Ancient Rome? Or Gethsemane? Or Gettysburg? Or meet such people as Aristotle, F. Scott Fitzgerald, St. Paul, Byron, Napoleon, Genghis Khan, Tolstoi, Thurber, Whitman, Emily Dickinson and Margaret Mead? To say nothing of Gulliver, Scarlett O'Hara, Jane Eyre, Gatsby, Oliver Twist, Heathcliff, Captain Ahab, Raskolnikov, and Tom Swift.

With books you climb Everest, drop to the bottom of the Atlantic. You step upon the Galapagos, sail alone around the world, visit the Amazon, the Antarctic, the Nile. You can learn how to do anything from cooking to repairing a television set. With books you can explore the past, guess at the future, and make sense out of today.

Read. Your library has thousands of books, all of which are yours for the asking. And add books to your own library. With each book you add, your home grows bigger and more interesting."

There's a whole gambit of learning, but it's so eloquently done in this advertisement that I put it on there.

Now of course the *Alphabeta Cube* was moved during the construction of the [1999] library addition. It was right there in between Haggard Hall and the library. And when the addition came about they took that place for the new connection between the two parts of the library.

Beautifully done addition it seems to me also. Zimmer, Gunsul, Frasca (ZGF) of Portland and Seattle did the addition. I guess Evett Ruffcorn was the designer, he did a nice job. But the sculpture as well as the fountain that was there (Jim Fitzgerald's *Rain Forest*) had to be moved.

I understand the *Alphabeta Cube* is down near Fairhaven or Huxley Colleges.

Well now that the construction is done, there's a nice plaza there opposite the rock as you come into the library and it's a good place to bring the *Alphabeta Cube* back and maybe the fountain too—although that would be more difficult because of the plumbing and everything else. But at any rate whether it comes back or not (and I hope it does), a bronze plaque should be made with these letters incised in bronze so they're more legible. I'm sure that the wood over the years has deteriorated enough so that my incised letters are probably no longer legible and so inconspicuous anyway that probably very few kids have seen it. But if a plaque would be put there and the thing would come back, I would be very happy.

SI: Was it your expectation that people would carve on it?

FB: Yes, I knew that they would carve on it and I didn't mind that.

You know, looking back on it now, maybe I would have made it a bronze but it only cost five-thousand dollars. As a matter of fact, I got nothing for it, that was the cost of the material, building it and everything else. I really donated it to the campus which is fine. I didn't expect money particularly. It would be nice to get money, but I really wanted to have a sculpture there because of what it would mean to the kids over the years. I thought the fact that it's in wood and might, over the years, acquire this patina of students writing and carving on it, it doesn't matter. It shows that it's used. I wouldn't like it if they just white-washed the whole thing (well that could come off). I noticed up on Ridgeway, a big graffiti sign that somebody's written in very large letters in white on the red brick, "Gamma, this way" with an arrow. At any rate, that's a little bit of the story of the art program too and a little bit of the part I played in it and some fine artists like Beyer and Warsinske and Noel Osheroff.

SI: I've done a lot of tours on campus, and I'm not particularly knowledgeable in the arts, but I have explained the *Alphabeta Cube* several times, and roughly said what you just said.

FB: Terrific.

SI: Well I have no more specific questions. I'm curious about what your reaction might be to the [Richard] Serra sculpture, [*Wright's Triangle*]?

FB: I don't mind it. It's not one of my favorites but it's a nice piece in some ways.

SI: When you were talking of the building under construction in Seattle with the severe planes of steel, I haven't seen the building but…

FB: Oh yes, the new library.

SI: Yes, that it had that [severe plane of steel] that's one of the characteristics of the Serra piece…that it's threatening.

FB: Yes, a bit threatening. His work is a little bit that way. It's controversial, he's a controversial subject. Somebody has written about him recently in the most glowing terms, that he's the greatest artist in the world, or at least in this country. I quite disagree with that assessment. I like some of his things a good deal, others I find not of the same caliber. And as a matter of fact he is not one that I would select as an artist for my work generally. He's the one who did the famous tilted arch piece about sixty or eighty feet long, or maybe it was hundred and twenty feet long, ¾ inch steel, heavy steel, rusty steel, (it rusts of course as soon as it's in the outdoors). It was actually built and placed at an enormous cost, half a million dollars or whatever it was, on the plaza of the Federal Building in New York City [Jacob K. Javits Federal Building]. It's this band of steel about ten feet high, leaning and in a slight curve that whole distance. The occupants of the building, the employees and some of the public criticized it, and opposed it so violently, because they couldn't get across the plaza. They would have to go 100 feet around to go where they were going, and they felt it was hostile, unfriendly and an imposition. They objected so violently that there was talk of taking it away. The sculptor, Richard Serra, said he would move, leave the United States if that were moved. It was moved finally, because there were lawsuits and tremendous controversy. But Serra's still with us, he did not move. And at any rate, it's interesting; the whole art discussion of course is endless and fascinating. Fashions come and go but there are some wonderful sculptures and I think the piece that Noguchi did at WWU, the *Skyviewing Sculpture* is one of the finest pieces he has ever done. I love it.

I had some association with Noguchi myself as I mentioned yesterday in the symposium. I don't think his best work is down at the Federal building in Seattle that I did. That's not bad, [but] it isn't my favorite. But the *Skyviewing Sculpture* is, and the *Black Sun* in Seattle next to the Asian Art Museum. He was a great, great sculptor. Learned with [Constantin Brancusi] and then on his own, did his own thing, but the two of them and [Alexander Calder] are certainly among the greatest artists of all time in my opinion. Of course everybody's opinion is different, and everybody's opinion can be disputed, fortunately, in this country still.
Well I'm honored to be asked to do an oral history and to be up here at all. It's been a great pleasure.

SI: Thank you very much.

FB: Thank you.