

Jerome “Jerry” Bruner

Video 1

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Hi, my name is Audrey Amrein-Beardsley. I’m an associate professor at Arizona State University. Today I am the very fortunate host of a show titled, *Inside the Academy*, during which we are going to interview Dr. Jerome Bruner. Thank you, Jerome, for being here today.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

Pleasure.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You were the only son of Polish immigrants, born here in New York City in 1915. Tell us about your childhood.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

Oh, my goodness. About my childhood. My father, first of all, let me be clear about several things. First of all, I grew up right outside New York City, what was then Lawrence, is now Far Rockaway, something like that. I grew up on a block called Seneca Street, and Seneca Street was sort of the first chapter in my life. It was a very interesting one because we had a gang, we had a gang of kids there that (1:00) had a combination of loving sports, we’d make up some of the sports we were on, but also funnily as I look back at the thing, kind of creative at making up stories and making up games, not playing the regular kinds of games. So, for example, anything that you could produce that was somehow a little bit off color and funny was important in the gang. So, for example, on the corner of Seneca Street and Maud Avenue, right be the corner of my house, there was one of the mailboxes, which had the usually stamped in to, it had U-S-M-A-I-L, US Mail, so I kind of won the prize of the week for saying, “That really doesn’t stand for US Mail. It stands for Uncle Sam Married An Irish Lady.” And that was the truth of a thing like that. And I pick that up as kind of symbolic because (2:00) there was always within that group with Freddy Mauray, Bobby Herckern, and Jerry Reecefield, the four of us get our version of what reality was, so to speak. And to make it a little bit funny. Our parents didn’t quite know what the hell to do with us because we, well, anyway, they all went on. That was in the period of about age seven to age twelve or thirteen. And, so, we group up then, with “this is our territory.” We had a sense of territoriality and kind of ownership of the neighborhood. So when new people moved in, like in the house behind the row of trees behind us, a family moved in, and they didn’t have any kids (3:00), their name was Duncan. The curiosity began, “Who were these Duncans?” You, coming into our territory? So, although we were city kids with suburban kids, there was a sense of belonging. So, it was a funny kind of a thing. That was the early period. I had a sister, Alice, and an older brother, sister, who, much older like that, who were important because in some way the served in kind of a parental role. My brother, Adolf, who was the first, I was thinking about it the other day when I went to go visit, another visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and he was the first one to take me to the Met. So I had that, but also, then my sister Alice, who was the one who was always questions (4:00), I was called Sonny in those days, “Sonny, why do you think that?” She was always very smart, but she hated school, and so when

the time came, when she finished high school, she refused to go to college, to the considerable annoyance of my mother, I might say. So there was that early period, then somehow things went into a next chapter after my father died. We moved in to New York City for a year because my mother sold the house, went to New York, didn't quite go into the typical kind of widowly reaction, didn't quite know what to do. She still had these two teenage kids, Alice and me; and, so, we moved back to the place where we lived before, where we had so many friends. (5:00) And it was at that time that I turned into a water rat.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A water rat.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

A water rat, indeed. We, Lenny Jacobson, and Whitey Stern, and Justin Bayhern, and I got involved in boats, rowboats and stuff like that. So I went down at the local yard and helped cleaning the boats, for which we got free rowboats on our own and went out and explored the coast. This was on the Atlantic coast there and the Atlantic inland that goes in, so it was fairly safe for kids. And the water came to be something to me and has remained that way. I've always been closely related to with it. When we got sort of like that. We then, one reason or another, (6:00) Lenny Jacobson was the rich one of our little gang at that particular point, we got interested in outboard motors, cause, you know 19, you've got seven coming up, you'll see what I mean. So, we got an outboard motor, and then through one way or another, we got a racing hole, and we decided what we would do is typical of this group of four kids, we took the engine and we made it so that it was smooth as could be, that is to say we put graphite in, turning over the motors to smooth the cylinders, and so on like that; and we took the boat and finished up its bottom and decided, Lenny was the owner, and we, the boat was called The Demon, and we were the Demon Crew. We got the thing in great shape, (7:00) the boat and the motor in great shape, and we decided Lenny should drive it in the Round Manhattan Race. There's a, in those days, I don't think they do it anymore because there's too much shipping, plus because kids probably aren't as crazy as they were back then, or something like that. So, he entered the Round Manhattan Race, and everything all like that, and they had both an amateur and a professional division, and who do you think won the Round Manhattan Race.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You certainly did.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Lenny. He won it. He won it, and then when Terry Faulk (7:41) was in Motorboat Magazine, there was an ad for Mobil Oil, something like that, and they asked Lenny if he would pose for a picture for Mobil Oil. And we were then, this was before college. We were just high school kids. So, we did that. Then that sort of went on (8:00) for a while.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Did you attend public school here in New York?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yes, I did. I attended mostly public schools because my last year, my mother move around when my father died. We started moving back and forth to Florida and so I you don't realize it, but you are sitting in the presence of a graduate of Ida Fisher High School in Miami, Florida. She would go down there, and we would go back and forth, and wherever she went, I would go to school. So I had to learn, somehow, to be a kid who was not just okay with studies, I kept that down a little bit, you didn't want to show off that you were the bright kid (9:00) in the class, I mean perish the thought of being the bright kid in the class. So, how to put it, so down, so there I was down there in florida, still fooling around with boats and sort of back and forth. How to describe it? Exploring Biscayne Bay the way we had explored the area around us, the water had still continued. But that was particularly interesting kind of thing because we alos, I also had to show that I was okay at school, I discovered that I was a fairly fast runner, at 400 meters, I did that. I can't remember if I won or if I was runner up in the city championship or something like that. So we had, at Ida Fisher High School, (10:00) not only was I a graduate, but I was captain of the track team. It seems so hard to reconstruct the thing. So, then, there was going back and forth, and my family, because of the fact that my brother-in-law had been there, my older sister's husband, waned me to go to Cornell, I was already in that rebellious stage; and I decided what I already wanted to do was not there, I had been reading in paper about all these brilliant scholars who had been attracted to Duke University, which was filthy rich. William McDougal, Donald Adams, like that; so I went down to Duke. And found that it was made up of two, a great majority were sort of my Duke kids, something like (11:00) that, who played games, with girls who were very interesting, I liked them. I still remember Hellen Pollard and some of the others. They were southern girls, and I had forgotten about the fact the degree of sophistication of southern girls. It was much more in terms of me. So I got the, I had my own gang, we gathered around students in McDougal's class and his seminar, and we would hang out together. They were graduate students, some were instructors, and I was a kid. So I was kind of adopted in. I graduated from Duke, and while I was there, I had the great good luck that (12:00) William McDougal, he would, when I asked him if I could be of any help to him, he said, "Yes." So I was his assistant to his famous experiment to show that there was something to Lamarckian Evolutionary Theory, that if you get a group of animals trained, that somehow the training would pass on to another generation—a very conflicted stuff. I finished at Duke. While I was there, started a new phase of my life. I became interested in doing research, and they said to me, "Yeah, you can do research." And I said, "Can I have some rats to do research on?" So they got me my first set of rats, and I did experiments on the effects of shock.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

This is at Duke, still?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yeah, this is (13:00) at Duke.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you're still an undergrad at this point?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

I was an undergraduate, yeah. When I was an undergraduate, I finished my coursework in three years because I got bored with it and took some. My fourth year I was technically in graduate

school, still a fourth year of college, and began doing research with rats. I became increasingly to the conclusion that there was something missing here. Someway in which, rats are interesting, but so damn basic that it doesn't tell you very much in what I was interested in, which was how do people work.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So rats aren't similar to people?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

So there was no way of doing that sort of thing. Anyway, the time came, and I graduated in honors and blah blah blah. (14:00) I had a discussion with Professor McDougal about where to go next; and the two choices, one of them was Yale, which was doing wonderful research on Learning Theory, mostly on rats and monkeys. And the other was Harvard, which was doing research across the board on everything—typical Harvard spread.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Notable choices for you.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yeah. We talked for about an hour, and Professor McDougal said in his wonderful West England, upper class accent, "I think, Mr. Bruner, that Harvard would suit you better than Yale." So, I put in to Harvard, thinking they would never accept me—who am I? But they did accept me, and I went up there (15:00) and got very much involved in the same kind of research up there. But then I began increasingly to start meeting people that were involved in more socially political kinds of things at Harvard. Following national politics and stuff like that, and I wanted to get a little closer to that. So, I became interested in a funny kind of question, how do people categorize things in the world? Here versus there, but what makes them sort out? They're poor, they're rich, they're to be respected, they're not. So I started working on categorization, and no one had really worked on categorization for about a century or so, but there was some good stuff from about the 19th century because this was a period when Europe was coming into new riches, (16:00) in particular Germany where they were forming this new richer upper middle class. So I began working on that and published a book, which was called, *A Study of Thinking*. To my great surprise, I thought, "Oh, my god. This is an over intellectualized book to sell to the usual 200 people who..." It was a knockout. Then, it's been translated into various languages. So, then right around that same period, something else happened, it was a very important turning point in my life, which was that the Russians launched Sputnik. The National Academy of Scientists brought a group together (17:00) to discuss what the hell happened; and they came to the conclusion that what had happened, the reason the Russians were ahead of us was because our schools were so lousy, and we had to improve American education. So we set up this group—at Woods Hole (Massachusetts) where the Woods Hole Conference (1959) went (17:20). I published the book called, *The Process of Education*, talking about the need for people understanding the structure of the knowledge they have, not just about of facts; but how to take the structure and manipulate and stuff like that. To my astonishment, that book, *The Process of Education*, that book came out first in English, ended up being translated into 14 different languages and has sold a half million copies, most of which is paid to Harvard University (18:00) Press, rather than me. Being an author, I want to advise you if you continue writing because

people will never get you rich—it'll help get publishers rich. To come back to the serious business, at that particular point, I came increasingly to the conclusion that something had to be done about education. I started pushing and organizing a group, and we set up a group of top-notch people around the country to come together, what could should be done with the American educational system. And we had some effect for the first four or five years. There were changes to the curriculum, the curriculum, rather than be a bunch of babble, we had some structure that you could go from what you had learned into what was possible. Which, to me, is very central.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So before this point, you were not necessarily interested in education (19:00) until the launch of Sputnik, and then you were drawn into this. Is that correct?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yeah, I think that's, I was interested, but in a rather vague way. The only contact I really had with education back in those days was the fact that Frank Keppel was the dean of the school of education, a very nice guy, and he and I used to play squash once a week. When we were catching our breath between. You've never played squash, have you?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No, I haven't.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

It's a very breathtaking game. So, we would sit and sort of take a rest after every other game and talk about education. It was kind of interesting. Then I began reading things about the way in which, first there was a study out of Lansing, Michigan, the way in which kids who did not, who had, who were given the opportunity to (20:00) have early childhood education, preschool education, did so much better in school than the kids who didn't. I got kind of interested because it was related to my research. Much of my research up to that particular point, during that research I did a lot of work on perception. And people would say, "That's interesting." My analysts, for example, said to me, Edward (inaudible), a Vietnamese, "Why are you so interested in perception, Jerry?" And I don't know. I think it may have had to do with the fact that I was born blind. I don't remember ever having any troubles, my cataracts were removed. I was interested in that. I came increasingly to the view that perception was based on hypotheses. That is to say, your perception was selective (21:00) in terms of what you expected to see, and I wanted, therefore, to study the expectations. I got into this. And then it was all part of that same process where I came to the view that if the poor kid who had no expectations of anything would ignore many things of the environment, in some sense was a shutting off. It was for that reason, that I got very much interested in giving kids a head start. Then I came on to that Lansing, Michigan study and I still remember the follow-up to that. I was going back and forth to Washington on a White House committee on sort of education in general. This was after the Woods Hole report. I went to pick up Sergeant Shriver, who's John Kennedy's brother-in-law, (22:00) and Kennedy had died about the year or so before, and I told him about this Lansing study and how giving kids a head start at a small age would give them a chance later on in life. And he said, "I'm going to a reception at the White House. Come along with me, Jerry." So I went over there and was standing in line, and we came, this was in the Johnson was president,

we came to Mrs. Johnson and Sergeant introduced me to Lady Bird Johnson and said to her, "He's got all sorts of ideas about the way in which you can give kids some sort of a head start." And she said, I still remember her accent, "Why, that's such an interesting idea. I propose that we do something about that. I'd like to hear more." So, anyway, we then set up this committee, which then got Congress (23:00) to give a measly, lousy little grant of about 20 million dollars to set up Head Start around the country. Twenty million dollars isn't enough to stick in your eye for that kind of a thing like that. But the interesting thing is that it caught on. Go back to that period, then took off. It moved along. Then, how to describe the next thing? I became increasingly interested in what in the hell is the nature of the culture that produces this kind of thing? What is this relationship between culture and mind? I had lots of anthropologist friends, like Clyde Carcone was one of them, Leonard Bloom another one, changed his name to Broome eventually and did some work with the Cherokee down on the North Carolina reservation (24:00). Watching things like that and noticing the interesting kind of way in which there was not all that much elaboration with the, you didn't hear, "What do you mean, sonny?" I got interested in how we could push that. That was another thing that moved me in that general direction. And got interested in this in connection with, how the cultures operated and managed somehow, and I got Patty Greenfield to come along with me too on this one, managed, I thought I would go to Senegal. Senegal was a particularly interesting one for me. It posed no particular problem for me because their European language was French, and I speak French fairly fluently. So I went to Senegal, and it was an eye-opener (25:00). So I decided that I would work more on the cultural side of things and got interested increasingly in the cultural side of the psychological approach. And did that and came back a few years later. Came to New York to be a professor at The New School. The New School was interesting because they had some bright people there who were great fun to talk with; but they were not engaged. I had the feeling somehow that it was looking at the world from the outside. That it lacked the normative thing, you know, "Hey, what are you doing now? What are you doing about it?" So I came to NYU first giving some lectures in the psychology department; but got to know some of the people over at the law school, (26:00) particularly a gentleman by the name of Anthony Amsterdam, Tony Amsterdam, who works on the excessiveness of America's punitive system, the legal system, particularly the death penalty but also had done a lot of work on human rights and that kind of thing in the south. So we decided that we would teach a seminar together, and there's nothing like getting involved in the study that's necessary before you teach something. I read, I must say, there I was by then in to my 70s, I started reading again, like a 70 year old, "My god, how did I ever overlook this? This is impossible." And started off on that, which started a new phase.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A new phase at 70. (27:00)

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yes. They said, "Why don't you come over to the law school?" So we went over to see the dean, I've forgotten his name now and about whether I could have some sort of appointment there, and he said, "We've got a better system than that. We've got something called University Professorships where you can teach in any as a university professor." I think there were about maybe a dozen, not many, close to a dozen people who were University Professor. So I became an official member of the University Professorship group at New York University, teaching in the law school, and I've been doing it ever since, working on death penalty cases and that type of

thing and trying to understand what is it that is so punitive about (28:00) the American attitude toward crime. I have to say that I can't give you a quick summary. The answer to that question is, "I don't know."

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's the answer you're trying to discover.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

It's a puzzling kind of a question, but I'm working on it like mad. Then, one summer I was in Europe, and I, I should tell you that I have a little house in West Cork in Ireland—you'll have to come someday, you'll like it—I was in touch, I had been, I had been to a meeting in New Orleans on an international child study group or something and had met a lady there who was involved in something called Reggio Children. She had, I had given a course, a talk in New Orleans about the importance of the, a very Russian (29:00) idea, about not only exposing kids to ideas, but getting them involved, involvement, using the ideas for something that you don't have to just have it to stick in your bean. It's the way you can think with it. She got back to Reggio and told the people there about it, and the guy who was the inspiration, who is still alive, a guy by the name of Lawrence Malaguzzi, and he said, "You must come for a visit to see what we're doing in Reggio Emilia with these kids where we take a whole bunch of them, and we put them into a nursery school. The main idea is to get them the idea of reciprocity projects on their own, yet learning how to cooperate with other kids and doing it in this particular setting. So there I was in Ireland, phone call and says, "Why don't you come to Reggio Emilia?" That was 16 years ago. So I went, and it knocked off my pants. Boy, (30:00) not only was the school doing something, but the people in the town, if I could use the Italian expression, "Fiero. Proud. Proud." They were so proud of their Reggio Emilia. This, in a town, as I mentioned before I started on this, which is famous for its high tech engineering and for the making of women's dresses, which it ships by the gross tons to the U.S. for you gals to look somewhat Italian. So I got involved in that, and the importance of two things, one of which was the reciprocity that is to say, entering an adult world where the adult answers your questions as best he can and finds out what it is that you're trying to say and continues along that; and then the group gets together and shares their stuff. The level of exchange was remarkable. So, I went back (31:00), I should mention that the year before I got there, Malaguzzi died, he had a heart attack. So in another way, my going there was partly because there were mostly women involved in early education and that—I think they needed a man to go talk to the mayor and a thing like that. I hate that kind of thing, but I'll do it if it's necessary.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If it gets the job done.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

A lot of this goes back to my sister, Alice, the one I was telling about, who was a very strong-minded one. I come from a family of strong-minded women. Like among the graduate women I had, like Sue Kerry and Patty Greenfield (32:00). What was I saying? Oh, I went there and it was so interesting, the extent to which it had the effect of opening in my mind as well, I had gotten a lot of education, the importance certain kinds of basic skills, like the notion of reciprocity, that when I talk, I should not only be talking, but should be trying to figure out where you're

understanding what I mean. Teaching kids that, three year old kids that, where it's a very interesting idea, they don't get super efficient at it, but it gets them on the way to doing it. So I've worked on that, still going back. It's interesting to me, gradually, the idea has spread, and now Reggio Children, despite (33:00) the fact that you haven't heard of them, has become world famous. The great problem is, what in God's name do you do with the numbers of visitors from North America, Sweden who come to see it, so they've set up a little institute for foreign visitors, which is a good way to solve problems, as you know. That gets me up there. What's so interesting is that it has given me kind of, you know, contrast quite frequently, increases your consciousness. So I live for a month in the summer in a European setting, and Italian setting in particular—despite my Italian is simply awful—they won't let me learn it! They all want to learn English. (34:00) “Inglés, por favor?” You know. So, I go on speaking dumb schoolboy Italian. I've been doing that. What I really needed, what I really needed was the usual sort of business in getting into a foreign language, which usually takes all kinds of odd forms like, I'm very fluent in French, but I had a French girlfriend, which goes a long way. A French girlfriend, who certainly disabused me about all the stereotypes about French women, let me tell you. Have you ever known any French women?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No. But I've known a lot about all the women through your stories.

Video 2

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

So here I am now, and I'm wondering to do. I'm at the moment writing a book on Reggio Emilia as an example of the way in which you combine both a sense of your own personal needs, but at the same time relate it to a communal set of requirements. Joining the communal and the personal, as one of the great problems of growing. I realize as I get to this late in life, I suppose I am, recognizing, my god, this has always been my problem. How do you get beyond the family? Various kinds of things. At one point, I remember thinking as a kid out on a boat, (1:00) how do people get their idea about crossing waters, or something like that. Where the hell does that come from? It doesn't come naturally to anybody, and thinking of that was very interesting. Partly, too, because of the fact that, as I said, my father was a watch manufacturer, and he had a factory, or at least the people who made the movements were in Switzerland, and we were in New York; so he had to travel to Switzerland twice a year. And one of my great excitements was coming in from our icky place out in the suburbs to see him off, and we would go on all these famous ships like the Berengaria or the Leviathan, you've probably never heard of both of them, that's from another era before they started flying. And I, (2:00) somehow the water, and the idea of crossing the water to go over to another kind of thing and compare civilizations had as much an impact on me as the general idea of anthropology and going to study the Cherokee, in contrasting the thing that way. It was partly that I'm sure, that when the time came, when I got this invitation, I was then teaching at Harvard, if it be permitted on your television thing, to say that I had become pissed off at Harvard because Harvard at that particular point had gone very conservative. It was during the period of time when there was liberation movement and stuff like that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Was this also the time where there was very behaviorist faculty on the faculty?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
They were getting more of them.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
They were getting more of them, and you were rejecting that?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
Yes, I was part of that same thing. So I decided (3:00) to accept the invitation from Oxford in spite of the fact that the then president of Harvard said, "We would really like to see you stay and see your views enter into this debate." I felt a little bad about that. But I went, and so then came the question, how do I go? What am I going to do with my beloved Westward Till, my sailboat? So I thought, I might ship it, on a ship's deck and discovered that shipping it on a ship's deck to England would cost twice as much as the boat had cost me because I had bought the boat for practically nothing from a very wealthy colleague who was vice president of, I guy by the name of Dick Pratt, a beautiful wood boat (4:00). So I decided the only thing to do was to sail it across, and I thought, "Could I gather a crew." And then, rather than being reluctant to suicide, then *BANG*, "I want to go!"

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
How many people were in your crew?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
Six.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Six of you?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
Yes. We had two watches and three each. You go by watches.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
How long did it take you to cross?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
About 16 or 17, 18, about 17 days.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
17 Days. Quite the adventure. Before you left, I wanted to touch on something. Colwyn Trevarthen, I talked to him, and said that one of your most significant accomplishments in terms of what he thought was your directing and developing or founding of the Harvard University Center of Cognitive Studies. Talk a little bit about that before we cross the Atlantic and go to Oxford.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Let me tell you about that because that's kind of interesting. Harvard, at that particular point (5:00), was moving on the one hand towards Skinnerian Behaviorism to fit both man and pigeon.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And baboon.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

No, no, no, Fred would never work on that kind of thing as advanced as baboons. Pigeons was as high as he went, I think he might have worked on rats. That on one, and then the big comfortable side, what is Andean culture like? History of Chinese culture. But somehow the individual people disappeared. So, how did you put the question to me?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about the Harvard University Center of Cognitive Studies that you developed.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

The combination of behaviorism and total culturalism left out man and his thought processes and his problem solving, and all like that. Pigeons may be okay if you want to study the way they peck at (6:00) a button, and Bolivian culture may be okay if you want to study. But what about people in a situation like that. So George Miller, who was teaching over in the Skinnerian dominated psychology department, and I was teaching in the increasingly culturally dominated department of social relations, decided, "Why are we spending anymore of our goddamned time fighting with our colleagues about," not fighting personally, we had fairly good relationships. We decided that maybe we ought to set up a center. I had brought a little group together in a little house on Bow Street, which we rented with funds from foundations and so on. Let's set the whole thing up. So we decided we would set up this center for cognitive and make it kind of a department (7:00) status kind of thing. We went to Paul Buck, who was then the dean, and thinking we had to get permission to do this. Thinking we would run into resistance and thinking of all the arguments we would have to use. When we posed the idea to Paul Buck, he said, "What a splendid idea. We've all been worried about what's been happening with all the sciences—go to it." He gave us the 10th and 11th floor of the William James Hall, this brand new, gorgeous building up there.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And that's where it started?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

So, then John Gardner was then the head of the Carnegie Corporation, Carnegie Foundation in New York, and I had known John since we, way back when we were students together at Harvard. We went to see if we could get a grant. We were thinking we would get a grant. We got the same response, "What a great idea." So we started (8:00) off with, what in those days was a big hunk of dough, with an initial 300,000 dollars. We started bringing in people from all over the world. That's how Colywn got there. Have you met Colywn?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The first time was online.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

He’s a charmer. You would love him. So there we were. The group we brought together, Patty Greenfield was a graduate student in those days. Have you met Patty? No, you said you had not met many people. You need a better air ticket. Within five or six years, it was the place where all the people that were the bright young (video 2, 8:55) group in psychology wanted to come. We had a fantastic collection (9:00). Two of them, for example one of them just won a Nobel Prize, Danny Kahneman, just won the Nobel Prize, Danny and Amos Tversky were working together, Amos died in the last about five years ago. His wife is still here in New York—she’s very nice. So they came in and started turning stuff out like that. Then George and I, in place of the introductory psychology course gave a yearlong gen ed. course at Harvard on man and society, Humanity and Culture, or whatever it was called. It was packed. Students wanted this kind of thing. At the end of the year, when The Harvard Crimson ran its poll, it was one of the two top chosen things as for teaching at Harvard. So, (10:00) so, those things, winning prizes, not like when I won the Balzan Prize, which was nice because I think it was like 275,000 bucks or something like that, but it’s for contribution to the understanding of humanity. It’s supposed to be the counterpart of the Nobel Prize and financed by money from the *Corriere della Sera* (video 2, 10:27)—filthy rich and plus a rich Swiss family. When success and prizes and that sort of thing put me in a slight tizzy. It’s like a tizzy made of partly of the fact that I am being oversold and I am being a phony and that feeling. You know that feeling well. And then the other (11:00) kind of thing was that it does is to concentrate the opposition. So this, for example, now the cognitive revolution has sort of swept America. The ones who remain as behaviorists might as well be Jesuits. I like an open society. The Center for Cognitive Studies had a huge effect.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Andrew Meltzoff is another one of your former mentees. He wrote and published an article about you as his mentor in *GQ Magazine*, and he wrote in there that you revolutionized psychology in America by establishing this center. Your interdisciplinary center practiced a new kind of psychology, one that talked about people’s minds, not rats’ behavior. We really have you to thank for the whole cognitive development...

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

Did he really say that?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He did. (12:00) Now Howard Gardner, I talked to him as well, and he recalls a conference in Paris, in which he was dining with scholars from around the world. Each and every one of them had something in common, that one person was you. You had inspired all of them at the table to become educational researchers because they had all read your book, *The Process of Education*, the book that the Harvard Press.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

Which had a very good translation into French, by the way.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes, yes. He says you can imagine the shock of a book that did not talk about IQ or reinforcement, especially in the Skinnerian times that you mentioned, and which placed broad disciplinary understanding at the center of education, which was again groundbreaking, especially at the time.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Isn't amazing that that should be groundbreaking?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Now. But we have you to thank that we say that now.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

You are most welcome. But, then... (13:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's...

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

I'm sorry

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No, go ahead

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Please, no, no, no, go ahead.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I was going to move on to another topic. So, continue.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

I was going to go on to how I was able to get in Harvard Law, so go ahead.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You also, another person, Michael Cole, I talked to him. He said that you share a great admiration for Alexander Romanov Luria. Who is Alexander Luria to you? How has he influenced you, Alexander Luria?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

He, he first came on a visit to America, and I met him, and I had not yet published very much, well I had some. So we thought about the thought processes and strategies of thinking and stylistic patterns that grow up on how you use your mind. And I thought, "Good god, (14:00) here's this guy 5,000 miles away I can talk to more readily than some of my colleagues across on the other side. I've got to go over to Harvard." It was the effect of Luria who had been principally influenced by his teacher, who was a man by the name of Lev Vygotsky, you know that name. So we started corresponding, and I would try out articles on him. You're going to laugh. The things that I was going to publish, I should try them out and see how my Russian

colleagues like this, so I would send him, and he would send back sometimes commentary as long as the article. Finally, he said, “Why don’t you come on a visit?” I had never been to Russia. So I went on what was first (15:00) of maybe four or five trips. I found these young Russian scholars in cognitive science, who were battling against Pavlov in much the same way as I had been battling against the Skinnerian approach. So it was hail fellow well met that I rather like Russian culture. There’s something about Russians that are very personable. We got on very well, and I know, the person who had done a lot of the arrangements of these things, the details, and so on, who knew how to, was a colleague of mine at Harvard by the name of Eugenia Haufmann. She was a wonderful person. She was Russian. So she managed (16:00) to get all of the millions of dirt work things out of the way, whatever you have to go through on the Russian things like that. So I made my first visit, and it was fantastic. I really, I loved, not so much Russia, but this new group that was finding a new way of speaking that was not just in psychology, but was to be what the new Russia is. It was breaking away from the kind of Balvonian Stalinist kind of thing. Finding the importance of spontaneity and their emphasis was on developing a sense of the impossible, and that appealed to me enormously. We got to be very, very close friends, and we had that in common. We had one other thing in common, which will amuse you. He (17:00) and me alike come from Jewish backgrounds, not completely, some of them, anyway, with not one ounce of religious interest or impulse in our body. But there is some interesting kind of way where in that background there’s a sort of stream of what I want to call Jewish skepticism and self-mockery that protects you to some extent from stuffiness, you know that kind of, they seem to be stuffy, you know that, “This is how I think it is, and this it how it is, and don’t...” that kind of thing. And he served very much that role among the Russians, the young Russians. And got this (18:00), you would have loved those kids. They’d come to Moscow, many of them from hick towns out in the country. Those hick towns were so, you know, rigidly Stalinist. So they got to this freer thing. And we’d have lots of fun. They knew all sorts of places that were trying out a new Russian version of jazz. You can imagine what it was like. So they, it was an interesting kind of thing, when the study of thinking came out, the first translation of the study of thinking was into what language? Russian. So I started corresponding. The influence that they’ve had on me has been mostly very much like the influence, for example that (19:00) Reggio Emilia has had in terms of looking at the way at which we conduct our education—the contrast business. The comparative perspective, I think is so important. That’s one of the reasons why I think it’s important to have departments of psychological departments, where you don’t just have one standard, blah, blah, blah, this is the point of view and stick with it. Give them the chance to battle back and forth, well not necessarily battle—tattle back and forth would be better.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Now you wrote the introduction to Vygotsky’s *Thought and Language*, right? And that was suppressed by Soviet authorities for over 20 years

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

That was what?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Suppressed by Soviet authorities. Suppressed.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

The book had been suppressed, that's right.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you were most instrumental also in introducing Vygotsky to American scholars, is that right?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

That's right.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You brought him over across the seas.

Video 3

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Now in 1970 when you traveled to Oxford, your're the only professor, is that right, who has traveled, as far as you know, for an appointment at Oxford University across the Atlantic Ocean?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

In his own boat.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In his own boat with a crew of five. A boat called the Western Till, is that right?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

That's right.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Andrew Meltzoff, one of your former students at Harvard, actually followed you across the Atlantic and recalls what really drove academics crazy around you was that wherever you went, you always seemed to have beautiful women in tow. He noted that it was well known that if you wanted to run into the most attractive and intellectually interesting females, you had better go find Jerry Bruner.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

I think that's wonderful. I'm very flattered that they believe so.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The women have had quite a role in your life, now haven't they? Intellectual women?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Well, I was just going so over the women collaborators I've had (1:00). They certainly have been real collaborators. I'm thinking of Patty Greenfield, I'm thinking of Jackie Goodnow, who was an Australian.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
And did you have followers as well?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
I never thought of it that way, no.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
You were surrounded by them either way.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
I was surrounded by them?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
That's what he said. He also says that he recalls you riding your bicycle across campus, dreaming about big ideas, all the while, you're students feared for your safety and the safety of others because the cars were driving down the wrong side of the road, and you were just going on your way, thinking of the next thing you were going to research and study.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
But I was a very good, I mean, I rode bikes because the fact of the matter is that we lived on College Hill, which had to go all the way down Bridle Street to get to Harvard. I'd take it in the morning (2:00). So if I had to do an errand or something around the square, I'd jump on my bike and do it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Bicycle riding intellect.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
I'm a bicycle rider. But that's also, I was going to say a characteristic, no I'm making that up.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Jose Lanaza, one of your former students also at Oxford, credits you for rescuing him from studying animal learning or his rats and inspiring him to study children. Jose remembers how you would escape from traditional methodological criticism and insist in the wonderful synchrony between mother and child and their early communications. You found that inspiring.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
I found it absolutely dumbfounding. I was absolutely dumbfounded in that capacity. To do it with no prior thing like that, the beginnings of language. For example, eye contact. Look me in the eye, and the child would smile at the eye contact, which would make the mother smile. And then the mother would (3:00) (nod), and then the child would (nod) in return. So, it made me increasingly convinced that there was a big innate element in human togetherness that could develop from there, but it had to have a kind of start.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Like nonverbal communication.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

It's the precondition for nonverbal communication. Yeah. On this very day, Gene Galanter is giving a lecture in Princeton, which I'm missing, don't worry.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sorry.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Proving how right I was about beginnings of language, so I'm very pleased with myself. And I also saw it in my own children. Having, for Christ's sake, having them look at their own behavior.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you developed, at Oxford, you developed a new psychology lab, is that right? Wasn't it initially, or recently it was named after you at Oxford? (4:00)

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yeah, they have a building named after me to.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The building is named after you at Oxford as well? That's quite the feather in your cap.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

You think?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I think so.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

I'm very proud of that. It's not a brand new building. What they did, they did the typical Oxford thing, "Oxford will not build a new building..."

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Oh, don't you try to minimize your building.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

What's that?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Don't try to minimize your building.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Oh, no, I'm not minimizing it. What they did is they took two old buildings, and they renovated them completely and put them together. They put a big sign in front: the Jerome Bruner Building. Yes, I felt very proud of that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Alison Gopnik...

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
I have to say, as I walk by, the typical, who me? What does Alison say?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Alison Gopnik, she was also another one of your graduate students, one thing is that you've got a lot of graduate students who appreciate your mentorship still to this day, but she was also with you at Oxford. She recalls fond memories of playing croquet. Playing croquet with (5:00) you in your garden by the river, as the little bit of Anglophilia you and she share. She also recalls a meeting with you...

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
I want you to know, I don't mean to boast, but when you get to have a croquet thing in your back yard, you get to be quite good, and you forget how good you can become at croquet, as compared, you beat the stuffings out of anyone who says, "Oh, I used to play croquet when I was a kid."

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
I do play croquet, and I'd beat the stuffings out of you, but that's okay.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
Alright, we'll have a go at it sometime.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
We'll have a go.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
You play croquet, still?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
I do. Alison also recalls a meeting with you decades later back here in New York, when you were in your 80s, and you explained your enthusiasm in great detail and your entirely new line of research, looking into legal cognitive science. This is in your 80s, so this is about 16 years ago. What has kept you driven all the while, now into your 90s? What keeps you driven?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
Driven is a funny word. I don't feel driven.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Inspired.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

I feel lured.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

(6:00) Lured. Okay.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yes. Well I tell you, that's interesting. That brings up a question. When I first started working with Tony Amsterdam, when he wanted to get my help on his death penalty cases, I began realizing that one of the things that we never look at in psychology is the normative. You don't want to say good or bad. You want to be neutral. As if you can be neutral about the human condition. So I found, here was the study of law, in which what you did was to take, essentially, human passions, things like vengeance, you say, you can't let vengeance loose, if you do, it's going to tear the society apart. So what you've got to do is develop a technique that essentially formalizes it, puts it into a context where the parties who are in conflict can agree to let it be adjudicated, and you work out formal methods of doing so, rather than, you know (7:00), you bitch, kind of thing like that. "The defense has stated blah, blah, blah," stuff like that. And you miss the fact that now, increasingly, the law is getting away from the old business of formal trial. The number of trials has dropped, and the number of what's called alternative dispute resolutions, ADR, alternate dispute resolutions, are coming up. People come together to discuss what their differences are, and how they might settle without going before a court of law, which ends up with lawyer bills, you know, going up like that. And the best lawyers are the ones who are pushing for this. Partly, I think, to control the unscrupulousness of the shyster lawyers, but nevermind. So I got very much interested in how people somehow come to common terms on a thing like that, which the thing that got me interested in how you move, (8:00) essentially, from a very personalized conception of the world, to thinking of the world as a communal type of place, which you've got to share and work in. So the law has provided me with a wonderful opportunity to do that. Yeah. Plus the fact that it's always fun, you know, like, it's a little bit like the new, I don't know what the novel reader, are you a novel reader?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Well you'll find a new novel and think, "How could I have overlooked Mary Jones?" The new novelist. I started reading the law—very exciting.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

This also relates to what Andrea Smorti had mentioned the story that you and your formal wife, Carol, had come across a town called Fiascherino in Italy—a place where you almost bought a home. You were thinking about buying a home. You had seen it in a picture book. Do you remember that?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Do I remember?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What happened?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

(9:00) Well, it didn't make a whole lot of sense because what you have to do is rent it when you're not there, or have somebody look after it, and you run up bills. I think Carol put it well, it's a much better fantasy than a fact. So we decided not to do it, although I don't know, now I'm not going to have any teaching duties next year or the academic year following, and I'm thinking of maybe making my headquarters somewhere in Italy. I'm not sure. Soleillo, Reggio, something like that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Andrea said that you saw it in the book, but when you reached the village, everything was so different, and unpleasant, and crowded. Does that ring a bell? He said that it was an example of deceptive reality. So it gets back to this notion of what you see in terms of what you experience. Does that ring a bell?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yes.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Rings everybody's bell (10:00).

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

He said according to this experience, you were capable of demonstrating, and you always have been, demonstrating that perception, thinking, memory, and language are acts of meaning by which the self constructs the world. This is this evolution across time in terms of thinking from behaviorism to social construction, and how coming across this town in Italy looking objectively at a book and actually experiencing it and constructing your reality once there was one of your life changing moments.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Good for Andrea. Do you know Andrea?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

No. I also talked to...

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

His wife is also wonderful.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I talked to Willem Levelt. He recalls working with you at Harvard, but most importantly your work with him in the 1970s on the Netherlands Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics. Tell us about this work.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
I should tell you about this work?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Yeah. What happened there.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
Well (11:00) psycholinguistics had not been much of a field. Linguists like to think of themselves as kind of mathematicians, the mathematicians of language, look at it just that way. And I felt increasingly, all those years, to some degree under the influence of Roman Jakobson, one of the greatest of his generation. But had to look also at the pragmatic side of language, not only the structure itself, but how the structure is used in communication. So, pursuing that, I got increasingly concerned with reviving the field of psycholinguistics, getting it to go beyond the kind of Chomskian formal structure type of thing, although I greatly admire what Noam has done for linguistics too. And, (12:00) then I became very interested also in the cultural patterning of language use, how it was used in the Italian versus the American, is a very different kind of thing like that. From the gestural period on, I mean. For example, interrupting somebody in Italian is far more offensive for the person interrupted, than it is in English because we're always interrupting each other. Interrupt an Italian, and you'll get that it brings the conversation closer to a close. So what was (13:00) Andrea's question? Say that again.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
The Max Plank Institute for Psycholinguistics, but also related to that, your book, *The Culture of Education*, and so that's kind of what you're touching on.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Reassessing the cognitive revolution in terms of taking in consideration sort of culture.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
That's right, yeah. Bring it right to the center of things. More with the nature of mind itself.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Another thing noted across all these people who have known you so well for so long, is that you are an excellent mentor to every graduate student that you've ever had, especially in terms of helping them develop as individuals, not as your apostles, for example.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
Yeah, I don't like apostles.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah, they really value the fact that you value them as individuals becoming individual scholars with individual interests, and you were very supportive of that. Oscar Chase was one of them. He is a professor and friend of yours at New York University, and he was very impressed by the care and time you continuously put into working with (14:00) students on their own research. He recalls a conversation he had with you once, and you responded in terms of why you do that, “Oscar, what the hell are we in the business for if we don’t take care about helping the students do their best work?” was your quote, your response back.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

Did I say that?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

I’ve never been really good at keeping my mouth shut about my strong convictions.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Oscar also notes how you know, or have known just about every important intellectual figure of the current and last century, and oftentimes this leads to funny moments, when you seem to assume that your friends share these acquaintances with you. Such was the case when you told Oscar once, “Oh, Oscar, you know how frustrating it can be to argue with Jacques Derrida.”

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

Derrida

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Derrida. And Oscar could only reply, “No.” Whom do you think of these countless scholars of time have influenced you most, and why? (15:00) Of all the scholars that you’ve interacted with in this century and the last, who most has influenced you?

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

What an interesting question. Well, I must say that one of them was Roman Jakobson, the great Russian linguist, professor of linguistics. He was a joint professor at Harvard and MIT. He kind of took me under his wing when I was quite a young kid on the faculty and introduced me to the idea of pragmatics. That is to say, the uses to which we put language, rather than just the structure of language itself. He had what(16:00) our German friends call *fingerspitz gefühl*, in a sense, fingertip use of the linguistic sense that used to just leave me, “Oh, God, if I could only develop that.” So he had a very strong influence on me. Funny, there are going to be two Russians on the top of my list. Another one was Alexander Romanovich Luria. He didn’t teach me, but we agreed on the fact that the thought processes, and even the perception, have to be thought of as embedded in a larger scale behavior that you had to take into account how you structured the task that, that (17:00), I see you under these circumstances in your role here, and I see him in his role, both monitoring how the thing is coming through editorially, and also doing a certain amount of listening to the content, I can see, but changes expression as he goes. And then

the other person who interested me and sort of set me on line, which was very important, was my teacher at the age of 19, 20, something like that, was the great William McDougal, Fellow of the Royal Society, who made me aware that you had to look at behavior as being motivated in some way and ask, "What is the direction in which it is being pushed?" Although I rejected a lot of what he had to say (18:00) on that. So they. Who were the people? There was one other person who influenced me. His picture is right over there with the, Robert Oppenheimer. I got to know Robert Oppenheimer in a curious kind of way. It was in the days when I was going down to Washington, that period during the Cold War, he was still the director of Los Alamos Station. I used to stay, when I went down to Washington, stay with old friends of mine, Ruth and Richard Tolman. Richard Tolman was the great physicist, and Ruth was a psychologist who would work with me (19:00) when I was doing some work in Washington. So I had a room there, and it was frequently the case that when I would, I would go directly from Union Station down to their place, and frequently would be the case that Robert Oppenheimer was also staying there, so we, Robert Oppenheimer, also another person I met who had a very strong influence on me was Niels Bohr, the great Nobel winner in physics. So we would get there, and Ruth and Rich would always be a little late in coming home, so we would have a cocktail together, and I want to introduce a new idea, perhaps, an official thing like that. One of the great ways of starting an intellectual friendship is over a cocktail. It's honestly true.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It'd be a very nice muse.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Of course it takes some of the guardedness away from the place.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Yeah, it's in some ways (20:00), somebody once said, I've forgotten who it was, it might have been my sister, say that the closes times for a married couple is when they're getting dressed in the morning and when they're getting undressed at night. It's during those periods they say, "Hey, Darling, what in the hell happened today." You know, that kind of thing like that. And in some interesting way, this is a comparable kind of thing when you get together with people, not on any official occasion, like teaching a seminar, but because it's the end of the day, you've just arrived, and you're having a cocktail together. You get with Robert, "Hey, Jerry, what in the hell do you guys mean by motivation?" To which your response in order to beg for a little bit more time (21:00), "What an interesting question."

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You just used that. You used that when I asked you that question.

Video 4

A:

So if all these people have had an influence on you, out of everything you've done in terms of your scholarly works, your books, and your articles, and your centers, what do you think has had the greatest influence on others? What do you see as your most accomplished or your most impactful work?

J:

Yeah, that's funny because there are people who have talked to me about that, and including Patty Greenfield, and I think that they, I think that the most important general influence has been to get away from the idea that behavior is to somehow be chopped out of its context, that it always has to be looked at contextually. That our conversation now is in the context of you interviewing me. We would go off on to all kinds of crazy jokey kinds of things (1:00). Though there were several occasions where we couldn't quite resist, anyway. But, this context bound, well what forms context? It's culture. That's why I say that to be, to be an adequate human being to some extent, you've got to be a little bit of any anthropologist.

A:

Sure, and reduce reductionism?

J:

Monotrope is the kind, but not too much.

A:

What about reductionism? So you started at Duke looking at how you put things in boxes and categories. How do you feel about reductionism?

J:

Hate it.

A:

Hate it? Reject it 100%?

J:

No, not 100%. I mean, there are times where, let me say, reductionists paint a premature reduction. I mean, do I have any objection to the fact that physics was able to make a good mathematical calculation, a good mathematical account, that you had consequences that you have to use of some formulas in between? And that's one of the great powers of the human (2:00) mind, that it is able to build a symbol system and make deductions from the symbol system, and then try it out on the world, and then say some deep thing like, "Jesus Christ, that really works. That's really true."

A:

Looking back at your career, if you were to start over, would you do anything differently?

J:

As if I'm in any position to say that. Would I do anything differently? No because it's a funny kind of meaningless question. The fact of the matter is that you did, you know, what

opportunities there were at the time. I go back to that conversation on the back lawn of the house of Professor McDougall's, when he said the two universities you should bear in mind, one of them was Yale, and the other one was Harvard. And (3:00) he was a little bit negative on Harvard because he said it was a terrible snob place, which isn't completely true. I mean, every university is a snob place. But should I have gone to Yale? No. I think, well, but on the other hand, I'm very struck by all of my Yale faculty friends who have intimate times with their colleagues. But on the other hand, they're bored to tears. They keep coming to New York. Why do they come to New York? Have you ever spent any time in New Haven?

A:
No.

J:
You're a lucky girl. It's a boring place.

A:
You are one of the esteemed 50 modern thinkers on education. Your chapter was written by Howard Gardner. Your book, *The Process of Education*, was praised as seminal, revolutionary, and a classic, and it dominated the Harvard University Press bestseller list for many years. And you've earned honorary degrees from Yale, Columbia, Sorbonne in Paris, Berlin, Rome, and many others. In 2002, you received your honorary doctorate in Crete, you know what I'm going to say?

J:
Yes, yes.

A:
Your friend, Giannis, recalls when you, he, and many others drank rocky, and instead of drinking black coffee to sober up, continued to drink rocky and smoke borrowed cigarettes. You were then...

J:
Did Giannis say that?

A:
He did. You were then 87, what is your secret to living such a long life?

J:
It must be God or biology's secret. I don't know.

A:
Drinking and smoking cigarettes isn't part of that?

J:
I don't smoke cigarettes. I smoke a pipe.

A:
You smoke a pipe.

J:
I used to smoke cigarettes, but I haven't smoked cigarettes in 10 years.

A:
Since 1987, or 2002? (5:00) When you were with Giannis, and you were borrowing his cigarettes.

J:
Oh, maybe it was because I ran out of tobacco, yeah, yeah, I did borrow some cigarettes. I find it, it's a very funny kind of thing, when you're with people and having a conversation, and they're smoking cigarettes, you want a cigarette. It isn't the cigarette, it's the, "I'll tell you."

A:
What you can do with it?

J:
Yeah, holding it in your hand and pointing it and saying, "Da, da, da."

A:
Howard Gardner recalls that you have always been extremely youthful, athletic, with features of a much younger person. He adds that while you may be 96, you are very youthful, the youngest and the most eager child in the class.

J:
Did Howard say that?

A:
Jose Linaza adds that you have a strong and well-fit body to support your active mind.

J:
Who said this?

A:
Jose Linaza.

J:
Was that Jose? Yeah.

A:
And underneath such a brilliant intelligence there is a warm and sympathetic heart that makes you a wonderful human being. (6:00) You also served... I know, look at that. You also served as the president of the American Educational Research Association in 1965. You have published countless articles and books, and you have received countless awards for your scholarship in

developmental psychology and your contributions to our understanding of the human condition. You have also mentored a laundry list of major figures in psychology, so many of your graduate students have gone on to become major, major figures in psychology.

J:

And none of them turned out to be strumpets. I'm really proud of that.

A:

You should be proud of that. Some of whom remain your mentees to this day. Some of whom responded here. So what's next? What haven't you accomplished that you still want to achieve?

J:

I would have to say that I would still like to have a better understanding of the arts (7:00), of why the need for the creation of beauty. Beauty with power, that is to say, beauty that penetrates, it's been something that has fascinated me ever since, I was mentioning my brother, Adolf, taking me to the museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, when I was eight or nine or ten for the first time, and I still remember the first seeing some of the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and saying to myself, "My gosh, I've never seen that part of people." What I would like, I would like to accomplish, and I think this is still one of the great mysteries, how it is, how it is, for example, that a really gifted artist can do five pictures of you, one of them which you would say, "Oh, God, that looks just like Audrey;" (8:00) another one that makes you look like a strumpet; one that makes you look like a saint. How the hell, what do we do to do that in the arts? Or a landscape, and that kind of thing like that, taken, for example, with the capacity, Van Gough, for example had the capacity to come into a scene, paint it, and give it a kind of a meaning. So what does art do? This has kept me going for a while. Also, it's what has been for me, I think, one of the nutriment that's fed my curiosity about other aspects of psychology. That, where in an organism that has this capacity, well the capacity, for example, that this little gang that got this place for, those Japanese (9:00) girls that were painting like that after it was nearly a century old, and turn it into this lovely kind of place, which everyone goes, "Wow, where did you get that..." You know that little courtyard you walked in on?

A:

Behind your home? Yes.

J:

That used to be a second-hand store, that space. They took it out, something like that. But this is, turning things into beauty. What, for example, makes New York, not only a powerhouse of a city, but I still have a feeling when I'm in a cab coming down Fifth Avenue and the last 20 or so blocks before you come to Washington Monument, Washington Square, how does a city grow to this kind of beauty. And you know, we don't know beans about that. We know people who can do it. We say, "Hey..." (10:00)

A:

We know how.

J:

Yeah. And we know something about how to educate. But that itself is kind of interesting. Last evening, for example, I was invited to come to a class over at Steinhardt School at NYU, that is run by a very interesting lady by the name of Susan Koff, and it's a class where they are teaching ballet dancers how to be ballet teachers. You watch them come forth with an idea about how to give somebody a sense of move, and then go through the dance movement itself. There was one Chinese man, maybe getting on in his 30s or something like that, he was very nice, I was sitting next to Susan, and he did a little pas de deux. I said, "Where the hell did a guy in (11:00) your class learn to dance like that?" She said, "Oh, he worked for four years in the ballet company in Shanghai. So how do they, that's the area of the arts and all the areas, we can turn the ordinary into the art, the possible art like that, everything, including interpersonal relations, into an art form. I have one, of the things I've always taken seriously is keeping my, particularly my doctoral students, from losing their artistry approach that they feel has become what we say in Italian is molto serio, very, very serious about the data, take it easy. So (12:00) they are, the arts.

A:
The arts. That's your next goal. That's next on the list.

J:
Well, that's next on the list, but I have been working on this since for decades.

A:
So finishing it is on the list? Okay, what inspires you?

J:
I haven't a clue. What inspires me?

A:
What inspires you?

J:
Well a billion things inspires me. One of the things that inspires me is exchanging conversations, finding a medium of lines, I find that so fascinating. It's the task of the novelist, the task of the poet, the task of our conversation today. How do we achieve it? It's amazing. I mean, how in the hell, did God or evolution (13:00) ever design a species that can do this kind of thing? It's amazing. This again, yeah, so that inspires me. That's one of the reasons why I've gone into... I remember sort of the first whole string of studies using, do you know what a tachistoscope is?

A:
No.

J:
A tachistoscope a very high-brow piece of apparatus that flashes a fixed light on off like pictures of anything a display, and you get your subject to report what they've seen as you increase the exposure. I published at least a dozen studies using the tachistoscope. I got the electrical engineering department at MIT to design one for me. I used to be so annoyed. It got to be called

the Bruner Tachistoscope; and I said, “No, it should be called the (14:00) MIT Tachistoscope. In there, it’s so interesting because the fact of the matter is that the world that you see has to do with what you expect to happen. That is to say, I can show you a display that if you’re expecting something of that category to display, you get it in a thousandth of a second. If you’re expecting something else, it will take you 30 thousandths of a second—30 times as long to think ahead. You know, you sit there like that. So what is this business of readiness? I developed then something which a lot of my second physicalistics I call it, which is the hypothesis theory of perception. That is to say, the perception dependent upon the working hypothesis that was present. And it’s that that goes back to my question in the arts (15:00), the arts somehow break your conventional hypotheses. I’ll tell you an interesting story about this, the way in which it comes. This has to do with the late physicist, Niels Bohr, much older than we are. We were talking about the, he wanted very much to know what the devil was going on in psychology, and I told him about the battle between behaviorists and the cognitivists and so on like that. And he said, “It’s interesting, it reminds me of the fact that there are different ways of saying, well I’ll tell you a story, my son, Aage, who also turned out to be a great physicist and a Nobel Laureate also, came home one day, he came to me, (16:00) and he showed me a toy, a new toy, ‘This is my new toy, Daddy.’ So I said to him, ‘Where did you get it, Aage?’ And said, ‘I was in the Five and Ten, and I saw it, and I put it in my pocket.’” And then Bohr turned to me and said, “I shall I now know my son, in the light of love or in the light of justice?” And I think it’s that kind of thing, which I think is so critical and to get my goddamn psychological colleagues to pay more attention to this. So I’ve got that string of people that you read off. They’re kind of the leading figures in the world today.

A:
They are, yeah.

J:
So yeah. Pretty hot shot gang.

A:
What do you find, you said what you find inspiring, what do you find uninspiring?

J:
(17:00) Uninspiring? What do you mean by uninspiring?

A:
What does not move you? What do you, what annoys you?

J:
Oh, what annoys me, yeah. Oh, what I’ll call persistent banality. When it goes on. Saying something that is so banal and bologna. I’m a rather well brought up kid—I don’t have it in me quite to say, “Will you please shut up?”

A:
Persistent banality? Have you coined that term in your writings?

J:

No, I coined it right now for you.

A:

You coined it right now. We're going to copyright that. Persistent banality. What is your favorite word, besides that one? Favorite word?

J:

(18:00) I don't think I have a favorite word. I don't have a favorite. I have a favorite put together words that's a very interesting kind of thing, and I have a very good poetry example, so, for example, I can recite through all 10 pages of Elliot's "Love Song for J. Alfred Prufrock."

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

Admit impediments. Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove:

O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,

Dut, dut, dut, dut...like that.

And, so what, how did you put the question?

A:

What your favorite word is.

J:

So it's the business of bringing, there's a combination of (19:00) economy. I mean, I think toward the very end of "Prufrock," by Elliot, it says, "If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved." That combination of words because that's interesting.

A:

That's interesting. It's the best of times, it's the worst of times. That would be another one that is just phenomenal, putting those words together.

J:

That's right.

A:

Okay, what is your favorite curse word?

J:

My favorite what?

A:

Curse word?

J:

I don't use curse words.

A:
You don't?

J:
No.

A:
Okay.

J:
I mean, do I ever use curse words?

A:
When you stub your toe, what do you say?

J:
Damn.

A:
Damn. Okay, there we go. We'll take it.

J:
You'll take damn, alright.

A:
What profession, other than your own, would have liked to attempt?

J:
(20:00) Would I like to attempted?

A:
Yeah.

J:
Well I have attempted another one, law. I'm not a practicing lawyer.

A:
Sure.

J:
I have to tell you a funny thing. John Sexton, who is now our president of the university, used to be dean of the law school, I said to him, "John, somebody was saying to me the other day, 'I ought to go take the bar exam.'" And John looked at me and said, "Jerry, I'll break your goddamn neck if you take the bar exam. You're so much more valuable as a non-lawyer."

A:

That's good. What profession, other than your own, would you not have liked to attempt?

J:
Becoming a businessman, investor kind of thing.

A:
Sure.

J:
That's not for me. I don't like that.

A:
What is your favorite movie?

J:
I don't go to the movies (21:00) that often. What is my favorite movie? I used to love those Marilyn Monroe movies. Do you remember those?

A:
Sure.

J:
Yeah, I'll take those.

A:
What about your favorite book?

J:
That changes from time to time. There have been different ones. There was one time when any novel of Thomas Mann was the greatest book in the world. I'd go right through the novels. I think I went through Mann's novels maybe twice. But then what's the big thick one, by Dostoyevsky, then I also went through a period where I thought Sinclair Lewis was the great narrator of the American scene. (22:00) I don't have a favorite book. But, and yet, and yet, and yet, some of Freud's early naïve writing I like very much. I like it very much because I like the daring of it, and he didn't have enough proof to stick in your eye, but he went his way, took his gamble, and he changed / my way of looking at the nature of man. Not that we are Freudians, but made us think, what do we think? You know?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
Sure. If you could tell President Obama one thing, what would it be?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER
To stick to his guns for Christ's sake, and not give in to those goddamn republicans that keep.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY
So what you really want to say?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Is that okay?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah. That's perfect. If you could have dinner with anybody, dead or alive, (23:00) who would it be and why?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Dinner with anybody, dead or alive? Isn't that interesting. Oh, I'd want to think about that because I keep thinking people and say, "Yeah, I'd really love to have dinner with them," so I can't think of one, you know? / Huh. Who would I like to have dinner with? Let me think about that. I can't answer that. I can't answer that because I can't think. No, no.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay. If heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive (24:00) at the Pearly Gates?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Well, I think I'd like to hear him say, "There's a gang here that are having a very interesting time, and I think they would be interested in having you join them." Yeah, yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Maybe for dinner. So you could answer both questions. What advice would you offer to graduate students and beginning researchers who hope to make a contribution to psychology or education?

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

To look good and close at how things go in life, and not narrowing it down into a little bitty laboratory, questionnaire kind of thing. But for God's sakes, to look at life. Take a look and brew about what aspect (25:00) you want to study. Don't just go ahead and follow some damn bird track. Which is what most of our graduate schools are doing now—handing out good bird tracks with big statistical means for showing that you're in or out of the bird track.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's nice, I like that. Okay, when asked to capture the essence and nature of Jerome Bruner, three themes emerged. You are a visionary. Andrea Smorti notes that your ability to find exceptional in the normality is your greatest talent. Andrew Metzoff notes that you can see the future and you helped create it. You are able to see around corners and predict the future before anyone else. Howard Gardner agrees, calling you the Moses in many fields of study. You see the field first, you make the initial profound statement of problems and methods, give the work a good start in the right direction...

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

And fix up all the black and blue marks of my colleagues. (26:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Like Moses, you are also content to leave it to others, especially your students, to explore the Promised Land.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

That’s what students are for, idiot.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

On that note, you are a great mentor and teacher. Colwyn Trevarthen notes the scope of your psychology is vast, but your principles are simple and clear, as you love life and people, and you love teaching. Jose Linaza says that above all else, you are a creative artist in the way you have shaped your life and lives of those who have had the privilege of being close to you, especially your students.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

I’m feeling very flattered at the moment. Go ahead, I love this, give me more.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Alison Gopnik agrees, your most note worthy accomplishment is that you have mentored generations of students who have again gone on to make substantial and entirely original contributions on their own with your support. You never had disciples. You are most brilliant. (27:00) Howard Gardner describes you as one of the most forefront educational thinkers of the era, stating that you really have no peers. That’s a nice one.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

I like that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Michael Cole and Giannis agree—Giannis likening you to Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky. In the end, Andrew Moltzoff captures you as follows, curious, creative, interested, and interesting, a mentor without match.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

A mentor without what?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A mentor without match. One who relishes the life of the mind and the hand; a thinker, as well as a doer; a social being who continues to find energy and joy in the ideas of others; and one who is passionate about ideas and the inexhaustible pursuit of new discoveries; one who is optimistic about human potential; and someone who found wisdom far before old age, yet held on to youthful enthusiasm long after (28:00) you were young. You’re one of the greatest thinkers about human nature and culture to have graced intellectual history.

JEROME “JERRY” BRUNER

I should have you come once and week and have you...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

I know, this is inspiring to hear what everybody had to say about you. And you have graced us. You would be at home in the fresco, by the Renaissance painter, Raphael, the School of Athens.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Oh, that's so nice. That's lovely.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

But that's just like your answer to the golden gates. You predicted that one. Well there is no doubt that you have graced us all today and throughout your academic history and past, and we, overtime, are bound to relish this conversation for everything you have done for us, for future educationists, educational researchers, and everyone else you have intellectually touched and inspired yourself. Giannis still has the glass that held your rocky from that night.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Has the glass that does what?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

The rocky that you drank that one night (29:00) with Giannis, the small one that you took from the restaurant filled to the rim. So while we are here, we lift our glasses of rocky and give cheers to you, our esteemed and beloved Jerry Bruner. Cheers.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Cheers to you. Thank you.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Thank you for having us for the interview.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

That was fun.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Entertaining. Yes, it was very insightful and inspiring.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

That was very nice. I mean, um, is anything left out that I should add to that? Not that I can think of. None of them recognized anything, my need for the bodily that I was successively, in spite of my presumed by vision, (30:00) which is bad, squash, tennis, rowing, sailing, I like that, I have needed, I have needed the counteractive automaticity of the body. I think the body is tremendously important. Keep you going. But then there's one / little thing you left out. You talked about all of these ladies in my life. Who are these ladies in my life?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Just the ladies who were following you around Oxford, I suppose.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

The ladies who were what?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Following you around Oxford when you were there.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Oh, yeah. Did I know most of them?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Let's see, Andrew Meltzoff, wherever you went, you always seemed to have beautiful women in tow.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

In tow.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In tow.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

I think... (31:00)

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You not only attracted the most beautiful, but also the smartest women. It was well known that if you wanted to go to run into the most attractive and intellectually interesting females, you better go find Jerry Bruner.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

For God's sakes, really? I'm glad to know I had that reputation.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah. I would love, yea.

JEROME "JERRY" BRUNER

Well, there you are.