

**T.P. Elliott-Smith**

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed in person by Jennifer Rudolph

March 20, 2014

Massasoit Community College – Brockton Campus

**Rudolph:** This is Jennifer Rudolph, Coordinator of Public Services and Instruction at Massasoit Community College library. Today is March 20, 2014. I am interviewing for the first time Professor T.P. Elliott-Smith of the Brockton campus. The interview is taking place at the Massasoit Community College library in Brockton, One Massasoit Boulevard. The interview is being conducted by the Massasoit Community College library and is part of the fiftieth anniversary oral history project. First I want to thank you, T.P. for coming and being interviewed by me for our project. I'm looking forward to it. First, could you tell me a little bit about yourself, where you grew up, where you went to school?

**Elliott-Smith:** I was born in New York City, Manhattan and I grew up as a Yankee fan. I'm sorry to admit that, but it's true. That was back in the forties. I went to K through two in the Bronx, and then I moved out to Long Island. Second World War was going on, my sister was working at Grumman Aircraft as an aeronautical engineer, and we lived about seven miles away from Bethpage, where they made the Grumman planes, the ones that were on top of the aircraft carriers, usually in the South Pacific. That was years three through seven. Eighth grade, I moved over with my brother in Crestwood, Westchester County. Spent a year with him, went through the eighth grade, and they sent me down to Florida, and I went to prep school in what is now a rather prestigious school—used to be a high school, now it is a college, and it's well known for its baseball players—Saint Leo's College. And I went there for a year, and then I moved down to Miami Beach, and I went to high school in Miami Beach for ten, eleven, and twelfth grade. That was 1949 when I moved to Florida in the first place. There were no television sets; well, there was television, but it was local only. There was no cable; there were no networks [*clears throat*], unless it was picked up locally. And so therefore, I lost all contact with the Yankees and was not a Yankee fan after that. I spent a year in New Jersey after I

graduated high school working, for the most part, on the race track, Monmouth Park, and up in Albany, and I worked in the race track up there [*clears throat*]. And then I was drafted. And I went to the United States Army, and I ended up in Fort Sam Houston, Texas at the—it was a medical center for training, and I’m trying to remember the name of it, and I’ll think of it in a second. But it was in San Antonio, Texas, and it was a very good medical training school. My local dentist went there when he was in the military. That’s where they train dentists; that’s where they train doctors how to be officers—they already know how to be dentists and doctors—but how to be officers—and they go around saluting everybody, which is fun because they salute privates and private first classes, too. So where I was in Oklahoma after I got my training, I was sent to Oklahoma for Fort Sill, and I worked in the emergency room of Fort Sill Hospital for about seventeen months and wanted to get away from Oklahoma, and it was time to think about where am I going to go to college. Oklahoma was flat; I wanted mountains. Oklahoma was brown; I wanted green. Oklahoma was dry; I wanted water.

So, Vermont is the Green Mountain State; that gave me two things at once: green and mountains. And it gave me water because there was a 175-mile-long lake, Lake Champlain. And there were four seasons, which I didn’t have in Oklahoma. And so I went to University of Vermont and loved it. Why did I pick it? Strictly on geography. Turned out later that it was a very good college to go to. Five years got me two degrees. And I became a Red Sox fan because I started working on the local radio station, which carried Red Sox games. And then I went to work at the local television station, the only one in Vermont at the time, and we used to carry the Red Sox and the New York Giants. But I was carrying the Red Sox and I got to work on the radio station, and some guy named Williams said, “You know, this kid Yastrzemski—however you pronounce his name—he’s going to be good.” And I said, “Gee, I think I’m going to have to pay attention to this team and see if this kid Yastrzemski is any good.” And it got my attention because my mother was born in Poland and Yastrzemski is a good Polish name, and I said, “Well, why not?” And you know what? He turned out to be a pretty fair baseball player. And so that’s a little bit about the history of where I got to be a Red Sox fan. And I’ve been ever since.

**[00:06:19]**

**Rudolph:** How did you go from being on radio to being a professor?

**Elliott-Smith:** I was taking speech courses at the University of Vermont, and I took speech in general, *How does Speech Happen?* and then I took courses in persuasion and argumentation and acting and writing for radio and TV. And it was natural to be working at the television station and doing all of these courses because they overlapped. And from that I was able to get my first job teaching speech. And my first job came about through the College of Education at Vermont. They got letters from everybody who had openings, and I went to Chelmsford High School in Massachusetts and taught speech for five years there, and that was high school level. And while I was doing that, I was teaching at what is now University of Massachusetts at Lowell, and it was called Lowell Tech at the time. So I was teaching there at night and teaching speech during the day, and I discovered along the way that I better get more degrees, so I picked up a master's degree from Salem State while I was teaching at night at Lowell and also at Chelmsford. And I discovered one certain thing about it. I was not slated to be a high school teacher. For some reason I just didn't want to deal with fifteen-year olds, and I grabbed the first opportunity I had to get out. And the first opportunity I had to get out was to teach nights at Lowell and to pick up my master's. Transition, how did I get from there to being a college professor? I knew I had to get out. I just didn't belong with fifteen-year olds, and that's what I kept getting; I kept getting sophomores in high school. Salem gave me the entrée to colleges with a master's degree, and I heard that there was this new thing called community colleges, and I didn't know anything about community colleges, but it sounded interesting, and it was, in essence, junior colleges. So, I started trying to find out where are there junior colleges. Well, there were a whole bunch of them in Massachusetts. And I found out that the guy who was running them all had his office in the state house in Boston. So I called up and I made an appointment. He had an office down in the cellar. And I ran across and met a gentleman named—oh, I knew his name two minutes ago—William Dwyer. And William Dwyer happens to be the same name as the guy who's responsible for Blue Hills School, and he's also William Dwyer. But I talked to William Dwyer—my Dr. Dwyer—in the bottom of the state house

**[00:10:02]:** during the February vacation, 1966. And we talked about why I wanted to teach. I told him flat out I liked teaching but not sophomores, not fifteen-year olds. And

then he asked me about my background, and I talked about my army and I talked about what I was interested in in the army, and I told him in the long run, I always thought I was going to go in for medicine. And being a medic, that was a logical thing. And when I went to University of Vermont, I studied pre-med all the way until my next-to-last semester. And for no reason that I can tell you now or could tell myself then, I decided I didn't want to do medicine, and that's when I started the idea of teaching. And with the master's degree and Dr. Dwyer, he said, "This is important. I want you to fill out your application." And he handed me his Parker 51 fountain pen. He said, "This is too important for a ball point. Use my Parker pen and fill out this application, and we'll take serious note of who you are and we'll work on it." And so I filled out the application with the Parker pen, gave the pen back to him. And by the way, I've collected Parkers ever since. I've got about ten of them and I love 'em. It got me to Massasoit.

On the seventeenth of March that year, a month later, we were celebrating my number one son's birthday—he was four years old. And his grandfather, a doctor in Needham, came up to Chelmsford when I was working at Chelmsford High School. And we had a beautiful dinner at his birthday party, and just about the time it was time to sit down and eat, the phone rang, and it was Dr. Dwyer, and he asked me if I would be willing to become an assistant professor at \$7,063 a year at Brockton Community College. And I \_\_\_(??) how I would very much like to do that. And he asked, "Is your word as good as a handshake?" and I said, "Better." He said, "Yes, that's true; you've got a good voice." And that was how I came to Massasoit. It was called Brockton Community College—didn't have a name yet. And it was the seventeenth of March, 1966, and on the nineteenth of September, we opened up. I forgot—on the first of August, I got a letter from Dr. Musselman, who became the president of the college, and in that letter he told me that he had appointed me as the bookstore manager. [*JR laughs*] If you think I have a puzzled look in my face, you should have seen my face when I found out I was the bookstore manager. And I spent the rest of the summer looking for the books. They were all over Plymouth County. The publishers were shipping them to the college. We had no address, and so they would leave them on the loading dock of all of the big UPS stations and all of the trucking stations, and I'd go and I'd knock, and I'd say, "Have you got anything for Massasoit?"

“Yeah, go on the loading dock.”

And I said, “I have a Saab—a little, tiny—how am I going to—”

“Well, that’s up to you, son. We’re not going to move any further than that.”

So I had to go one and two boxes of books at a time and carried them over to the Frolio School cellar, and then I got them all set up to build a book store manager’s operation. And that’s where all the books were purchased for the first year.

**Rudolph:** So, you were not only an assistant professor but you were also in charge of books?

**Elliott-Smith:** I was the bookstore manager from the first of August until the first day of classes. And the first day of classes, the Dean, [Philip] Melody, invited me out for lunch because I had all my classes at eight, nine, and ten o’clock. And we went out for lunch somewhere in Abington, and he said, “I’ve got a problem. I’m supposed to be teaching speech because that was my major when I was an undergraduate. [*clears throat*] But it’s too busy, I can’t do it. Would you teach another section of speech?” and I said, “Sure.” He said, “I’ll give the bookstore management to another person, but thank you very much for setting it up and making it work, and first day of classes is working because you got the books out, and I appreciate that.”

So the first semester we were open, I taught five classes. I had English Comp [composition] I and English Comp I and English Comp I and Speech and Speech. That was the first day. And it was fun. It was fun.

**[00:15:00]**

**Rudolph:** Now, when you were at Lowell, were you teaching at the college level at Lowell when you taught at night, [*talking at same time*] so this was not your first experience teaching with college level students?

**Elliott-Smith:** No, that’s where I was teaching composition and technical writing because Lowell Tech was primarily for engineers, and so I taught a lot of engineers, many of whom were in their thirties and forties, and yeah, that was college level. And I taught American Literature, a one-semester version, and that was college level, and I did that for four of the five years I was in Chelmsford.

**Rudolph:** Well, you obviously liked it better than the 15-year-olds.

**Elliott-Smith:** Absolutely! Fascinating people. I had a student I will never forget. I don't remember his name, but I remember him coming up to me in the last day of classes or last night and thanking me very much and congratulating me for being the easiest person he's ever lip read. And I said, "You're deaf?" and he said, "I'm stone deaf, and I have been since I was 22. I had an industrial accident where I got hit with a steel beam, and I lost my ability to hear," and he said, "and you're very easy to read lips on, and I wanted to thank you for that." I had no idea.

**Rudolph:** And he did well?

**Elliott-Smith:** Straight A. Straight A. He said, "Not everybody speaks and then turns around and writes on the blackboard and then repeats it again." He said, "You gave me the ability to see what you were saying and the ability to listen. But I couldn't listen, I just saw. And I could read your lips because I saw it being written on the board." And I said, "Well, thank you very much." And I've kept my mustache above my upper lip ever since because I have a godson who was mostly eighty-some odd percent deaf, and he said, "The fact that you shave above your upper lip, I can always see how it's moving, so I can always read your lips." So I've always kept my mustache short.

**Rudolph:** And perhaps your speech training has helped?

**Elliott-Smith:** Oh, absolutely. Well, what did I do when I was working at the TV station? I was doing commercials in English and in French, and I'm not a French speaker, but I was better than anybody else at the station; so therefore, they hired me. [*both laugh*].

**Rudolph:** You've told me about Speech and English, but what other positions have you held at Massasoit?

**Elliott-Smith:** Oh Lord. First of all, I've taught thirteen different courses or subjects. I taught Speech and I taught English Comp. At the end of the first year, the senior members of the English department got together and decided who was going to teach British Lit. [Literature], my undergraduate major; who is going to teach World Lit., which was not anything I knew about or had studied more than a little bit, and who was

going to teach American Lit.—were we actually going to teach American Lit? Because in 1966 and '67, University of Vermont did not have a course in American Lit. They had a British and American Lit. survey course two semesters, but the first person they talked about in the British and American was T.S. Elliott—1900, 1915, 1910, 1920—they didn't talk about Mark Twain; they didn't talk about Edgar Allen Poe. It wasn't really American Lit., but it was American Lit. from the twentieth century on. And I was the youngest in the department; I was thirty at the time, and the rest of the gentlemen, the ones you see in the walls in the purple lounge, they were sixty-five pushing seventy, and they got the expert courses, and I got American Lit., and so I taught myself American Lit. the summer before the second year the college was open. And it turned out to be there was only one section. Now we have I think five sections of American Lit. I and five sections of American Lit. II, and we do that both semesters. Plus I think we do it in the summer also. It's a very popular course. Now World Lit. is kind of limited and British Lit. is quite limited. I've never really taught Brit Lit. and that was my English department major. Speech I've done plenty of but then along came John Chase, another picture on the wall in the lobby of the Fine Arts building, the theater, and John was speech all the way, and so he taught all the speech courses and then they started hiring more people: Beth Morrell, and she did acting and she did oral interpretation, and they brought on more and more. But that's how it started, and that's how I shifted over.

History—I did that because nobody else would go down, and I taught at the Bridgewater prison and that was always interesting. And [*clears throat*], I did that for a couple of years and decided I didn't want to do it anymore and switched out. I did state and local government because the dean of the college, Barbara Finkelstein, said, "You know, you've been a town moderator for God knows how many years; you probably know more about local government than anybody that studied government." [*clears throat*] And so for about twenty-two years now, I've been teaching state and local government because I spent twenty-four years as a town moderator. And I was also on the finance committee for the town, and I was on the building committee for the town, municipal building committee, and we did town repairs and built prisoners' cells in the bottom of the police station, and I had to be there to sign off on that. So then I started teaching state and local,

and I've been doing that ever since, which is a lot of fun. A different type of student all together.

**[00:21:49]**

**Rudolph:** Now that puts you in two different divisions.

**Elliott-Smith:** Divisions, yeah.

**Rudolph:** Yes, how does that work?

**Elliott-Smith:** I go to both division meetings and I write it down and \_\_\_\_?? service? and very few people can do that. And I made a hundred dollars a year working as a town moderator, but I earned it back because I was able to teach in two divisions, and that's fun because I was able to spread out and do as many different things as possible.

**Rudolph:** It is interesting.

**Elliott-Smith:** My most exotic—I taught ceramics. [*JR laughs*] I did that for—

**Rudolph:** So you were also in the fine arts?

**Elliott-Smith:** Yeah. Yeah, I was in fine arts. I did all of the pottery and wheel throwing and did that for almost twenty-five years. That's the advantage of being here for a long time. You get to do lots of different things. And I enjoyed doing lots of different things. Pottery was wonderful. They moved it out to Blue Hills; I can't do it anymore, but I'd like to. I'd like to. It's a great way to relax after a department meeting [*JR laughs*], which can be very frustrating.

**Rudolph:** Now as one of the original faculty at Massasoit, you talked about your hiring process. Have you ever been involved in the hiring process of anyone else here and how is that? [*talking at same time*] What is that like, those beginnings of hiring?

**Elliott-Smith:** To find out how much patience you really have, the first time was maybe 1970-71. In those two years, we taught in three different buildings. We taught in Miramar in Duxbury; we taught in Howard School for Girls in West Bridgewater, and then we opened up the first part of this campus here in Brockton, and we had to hire a bunch of people. And I was on the hiring committee, and we hired Carl Kowalski, and part of his job was English department and part of his job was administrative under the dean. And it

was great because Carl and I taught simultaneously for a long time, and on a couple of occasions, he took over one of my courses back in '96. I had a heart attack, and he took over my philosophy classes, and he said, "I'll never do that again." And I said, "Why not?" He said, "I walked in, said good morning, introduced myself, and everybody picked up a fountain pen." [JR laughs] And I said, "What are you doing?" and they told me it was time to take notes, so they were ready. And he said, "I had no plans on teaching with notes at all." He said, "I was strictly asking questions and I was using the Socratic method, and they wanted me to tell them what to write down."

And I played tennis with Dean Kowalski's father who was a retired airplane pilot. We played tennis right out here on the tennis courts back when George Ayers was the president of the college. That would be '80, '81, '82—somewhere in there. And he used to have the people from the city of Brockton—the bank manager, the newspaper editor, and they'd all come and play on Thursday afternoons, and we didn't have enough, so we asked—found out that I played tennis, and I used to go Thursday and play with all the bank managers and the newspaper editor and the president of the college, and we had a grand old time. And then everybody got busy, and George Ayers left, and that was about the last time I ever used that tennis court. One of my sore points. They now have trees in the middle of that, and I'm still playing tennis and there are no trees in my tennis courts. So yes, I worked as hiring people, and it usually meant three hours a day, five days a week, and you read lots and lots and lots of resumes. In any particular time we ever did that, two hundred applications for five openings. So you read two hundred resumes, and you narrowed it down to five, and the president of the college would say, "Please, give me some good people to choose." And then he'd walk out and we wouldn't see him for a month, and he'd say, "Okay, let me have the list of five." And I'd give him five. Did I enjoy it? No. No, 'cause there's always a situation, This guy really sounds like the students would love him. But his credentials just aren't there. And do you hire credentials or do you hire that feeling you have that this guy likes to teach? And it was always a tough decision. One of the guys that used to be on the committee all the time said his wife said, "Honey, I know you're going to go for credentials, but he needs a job." And he'd say, "Yeah, honey, you can't tell me that." She said, "But you know that some of those people really need a job." And he'd say, "Yeah, well," and I'd say, "Just don't tell

me who you're going with; I'm going to have to go with credentials." And it was always tough. It was always tough because not having a job is a tough row to hoe.

**[00:27:53]**

**Rudolph:** It is. It is. Tell me a little bit about some of the people from the time when you started—Carl Kowalski and some of the others.

**Elliott-Smith:** Well, Carl didn't come in until six years later. Some of the people that we had at the very first: Bob Landry who ran the Business department. Maurice Walsh, BC [Boston College], who was mandatorily retired from BC when he turned sixty-five, I think, and he took over math and science department; he started it. John Norton was mandatorily retired from BC, and he took over the English department and anything we had in the way of fine arts and foreign language. Who else did we have in the very beginning? Um, hm. We had John Norton. We also had another gentleman named John, whose picture is up on the wall in the purple lounge. There's John Norton, Maurice Walsh, John somebody else. Harold Gay taught history. He was there at first, and we weren't sure that we were going to get him because he got hired in June, and I had a heart attack in July, and having him pull through so that he could start teaching in September was—we had our fingers crossed because you can't just rule him out because of the heart attack, and he turned out to be a very, very good professor for us in U.S. History and American History and Western Civ. [Civilization], for that matter.

**Rudolph:** You're talking about a lot of academic courses. When Massasoit started, was it academic primarily moving students from a two-year school to a four-year school, or were there the certificate programs that we have now?

**Elliott-Smith:** I would say about seventy-five percent was transfer and ready to go. And if you stop and take a look at the people that we had as students the first year—this story has been told so often that it's almost a joke in the English Department. On the first day that we had classes, my class roster started with a gentleman named Anania. And Kenny Anania was the first student that I had on the roster 'cause he was the first alphabetically. And he also turned out to be the first graduate of Massasoit that we hired as a full-time professor because after he went to Massasoit two years, he went to Stonehill College for two years, got his bachelor's degree, and then he went to Farleigh Dickinson for his

master's degree. And about a month before he actually graduated from Farleigh Dickinson down in New Jersey, we hired him, and he's been with us ever since. Who else did we hire? Tommy Frizzell. Right now I think we have about ten of my students now teaching here full time. It's at least ten of my students here and teaching, but I've had forty-four years to do it, so it's been fun. When am I gonna retire? Everybody asks. I have a sister who made fifty-five years of teaching, so at least I'm going to beat that, and when you stop and think that I've got forty-four at Massasoit, 'cause this is only forty-four years—pardon me, forty-eight years at Massasoit 'cause it's only forty-eight years old. But I also taught five years before that at Lowell Tech and at Chelmsford, so I've actually taught for fifty-three years, but then I also taught for the Army.

**Rudolph:** So, you've got more than fifty-three years?

**Elliott-Smith:** Well, yeah. They sent me to Germany a couple of times, and I taught American soldiers in Germany how to do nasty things. Well, I mean that's what the military is all about, right? We're not out passing out hors d'oeuvres.

**Rudolph:** *[laughs]* What was the college community like when you came here? You said that the college was kind of spread out all over—first it was Frolio, then the buildings were added.

**[00:32:54]**

**Elliott-Smith:** Then we went to West Bridgewater for the Howard School. Then we went to Duxbury for the Miramar School. And then we opened up the first section of classrooms on this campus—the Brocton campus. I remember when I first heard about the campus. A candidate to teach at Massasoit who eventually came some years later but knew all about where the campus was going to be because she knew all about Brockton and she knew about Abington, and she knew politically, and she led us over to this campus, which was just a big, open field. And she said, "This is where the college is going to be." And Dr. Dwyer and the president of the college, Dr. Musselman, said that this was going to be a college that would open up in September of 1966, and the buildings would all be built. And the next time *[laughs]* anybody said that was in '71 when we finally opened our first building.

**Rudolph:** Now what building was the first one here?

**Elliott-Smith:** Actually Business, Science, and Technology were the first three. And we had the cafeteria with the library. Of course, the library and that was first. And Dr. Musselman had his office downstairs in the library. And that was because we didn't have an administration building. We didn't have Humanities; we didn't have Fine Arts; we didn't have Liberal Arts. Those all came in the second phase. So what was it like? It was busy. And you had to step out of your class very quickly so the next group could get in because although we had a ten-minute break in between, you had to walk all over the place to move into the various classrooms. So yeah, you were busy. What was the rest of it like? I taught at Miramar and Brockton for two years. And so I lived on Route 106 in Halifax and I pull out of my driveway, and there would be Route 106. If I turned right, I would go to Brockton and teach on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If I turned left, I'd go to Miramar and Duxbury and teach on Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays. So I had to make the proper turn in the morning. And in the winter, of course, it was dark, but if I turned the wrong way, I was in the wrong campus.

**Rudolph:** Tell me about the students when you first came here. What were they like?

**Elliott-Smith:** For the most part, they were very good B students. And to put the letter B in front of it, what would I hope? The professors that came from BC were looking for A students. I have a friend of mine who used to teach here, is now teaching part-time at another institution, and he said, "I've taught for thirty-two years. I have never taught a class that was all English majors until this year." And he said, "It's a wondrous thing. It's different. The difference between teaching English, American Lit., or whatever in a community college and teaching at a university where everyone is an English major, that was a different thing." And he said, "I have to be very careful because they'll shoot me down if I make a mistake." And he said, "I can make mistakes here and get away with it and then embarrass myself next week and tell them where I made the mistake, and they're very forgiving." The people in 1966 seemed to be more ambitious. And I don't mean they wanted to graduate, I mean they wanted masters degrees. So that they seemed to be that much more committed. The fact that we've hired a bunch of them to teach here full time is not a coincidence. They were really dedicated. Look at the number of people

we're hiring right now. Not numbers—look at their creds—look at their credentials. We've got people with PhDs coming in to teach courses that that PhDs have never taught here at Massasoit. We are getting a lot of doctorates, and they've got two and three degrees beyond master's degrees, and they're highly qualified. We were highly qualified in 1966, but we were highly qualified in teaching junior colleges. Yeah, we taught some very good people at BC and the professors came here. We had people who were very good professors at Boston State College when they closed that down, and they came here to finish up their careers. But it was different than what we're hiring now. We're hiring lots of people who are getting their doctorate the first year they're working here. My dean just got her doctorate last week. We've got people in the English department who have just gotten their doctorates in the last six months. I think three of them, I believe. We're pulling down a higher level of credentials. That's very good.

**[00:39:04]**

**Rudolph:** It is good. Well, it probably also influences the students that they have. Maybe more students will come back here and teach.

**Elliott-Smith:** I hope so. I hope so. I tell my kids that they can go to Harvard and take introductory course in philosophy and they'll get somebody who has only been teaching for one year. And that person is probably working on his doctorate, and he's probably never maybe really ever taught intro. philosophy before. Here, you've got a full professor who has been teaching for forty some odd years. You can't beat that kind of credential. And they say, "Wow."

**Rudolph:** *[laughs]* Are those students who were here when you first came, are they different from the students we have now?

**Elliott-Smith:** To the degree that they're hungry for more, they're very similar. Terrific curiosity. You're going to ask me later about what is my style of teaching; am I a guide on the side or am I sage on the stage? I personally believe that the sage on the stage intrigues lots and lots of students. The ones we have now, even more so than the ones we had in 1966, they find that Aristotle seems to be a better sale—or better sell—than Socrates. Aristotle wanted to keep the people happy. Socrates wanted to keep them on their toes. I like keeping them fascinated because there's so much that's fascinating when

you start going back a thousand years or two thousand years. Watch Cosmos and see how fascinating it can get. So, do they seem to prefer that? I like to think so. But that's one man's opinion, and it's probably biased because I like teaching that way. I like the sage on the stage. I like bringing them ideas that they've never seen before rather than trying to drag it out of them. There are days when I walk out of class and know that my mother is a very happy person in her cemetery, wherever she is. She always wanted me to be a dentist, and God knows I pull teeth sometimes in my classroom. [JR laughs] The students think that's funny, too.

**Rudolph:** [laughs] You told me before we started a little bit about the time period when you came and perhaps a few years after the students you were getting were veterans from Vietnam.

**Elliott-Smith:** Oh Yes.

**Rudolph:** And now we're looking at veterans from Afghanistan again. So I'm wondering in that particular group, what do you see for your students?

**Elliott-Smith:** The veterans? They're coming with a recognizable wound, and it's mental. There is no doubt it's not a disorder; it's a true disease, and you catch it in combat. We have in our day-to-day living not too many incidences of being an inch and a half away from death. We're not used to seeing good friends die. We're not used to seeing the awareness of the fact that when you're not in combat, you've got knowledge that you can't use anywhere else without having people not understand what you're talking about. And so you find yourself talking to yourself. I'm a Cold War veteran. I spent twenty-seven years between the army reserve and being drafted into the army reserve. And I taught and I learned and I went to school and I traveled. And there are people on this campus who haven't the foggiest idea of what I did in the military nor will they know because an awful lot of what I did, you don't talk about. What did I teach? I said I taught how to do nasty things. Well, yeah, but there's much more to it than that. What do you do with somebody who decides to sell knowledge? I had to react to that; I had to deal with that because I had to have my clearances. And at the same time that I needed clearances, somebody somewhere in the world is selling their knowledge, their clearance material, which makes it twenty times tougher for me to get my clearance—and

twenty times easier to lose it. And if you lose it, you're out of a job. And if you're out of a job, you're not going to get your retirement. And besides which, I'm a Patriot. It's very important to me. What is it like? Vietnam brought back horrible stories. Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, likewise. Very unpleasant stories. When I was teaching up at Abington, the Frolio building was an old time building built by the Civilian Conservation [Corps] people—Franklin Roosevelt hiring people who didn't have jobs to build very nice classrooms. But they were old. Steam radiators that were almost four feet tall, and inevitably, there'd be one that needed to be tightened up. And I had this kid who got up in the middle of class, turned pure white, and said, "I've got to go." And he went out the door. And I saw him about two hours later, and I said, "What happened?" and he said, "Go back up to that classroom. Listen." And I went back to the classroom, and I—believe it or not, I could hear the sound of the mortar shells—only it was steam: *bzshhhh [making hissing/buzzing sound]*. And he was hearing mortars. And I just heard steam 'cause I had never heard mortars come at me. We had to move the classroom; he couldn't go back. That was Vietnam. Iraq? Two years ago, I had a student who said, "I've got a problem, Prof."

**[0:46:24]**

"What's wrong?"

"Uh, I'm going to lose a course."

"Why?"

He said, "The professor told me he was flunking me."

And I said, "Why?"

"Well, um, I can't get to class on time, and he locks the door, and he won't let me in if I'm late."

And I said, "Who's your professor?" and I found out, and I said, "We'll see if we can do something about that."

And I went and chatted with the professor, and he said, "Oh my God. Tell him to come back; it's okay. I had no idea. I forgot that we had to deal with this back in Vietnam days also." It turned out the young man told me that he can't walk into a crowd without getting

very, very anxious. So he said, “I stand outside the building and wait until everybody’s in, and then I go, but that gets me there late. But I can go in the corridors without having anybody bumping against my shoulders. I’ve gotten to be a claustrophobic.” He said, “I can’t handle that pressure.”

Is that different? It went on in Vietnam, and it went on now. It’s going on now. It’s tough. Night school. I think I probably after Vietnam and the Quinn Bill, I had every cop within fifty miles come to Massasoit because they found out that I could handle cops and English Composition. And they came to take English Comp because nobody wants to take English Comp. Everybody takes all of the courses they have to take, and they save English Comp for last because it’s not one of their favorites. Did it work that way with Vietnam? Yeah. So I got all the cops and all the firefighters because the Quinn Bill got them extra money for every course they got, and it’s going on now. And the GI Bill is bringing them on our campus. Do they have a lot to teach? They have a lot to teach the other students. The kids who just got through public school, and now they’re in college because everybody goes to college, and they come into class and there’s somebody in a classroom with—what do they call it? A dog that helps them—

**Rudolph:** Service dog?

**Elliott-Smith:** Service dog from here to there, and they get people who get up and walk out of class for no reason, except they have reasons. And they’re polite with these veterans, but they don’t understand them, and it was true back in the sixties and it’s true now. So, it’s amazing we’re doing the same old same old. Been there, done that. And here we go again because anxiety causes reactions that do not contribute to good study habits. And so you bend and you roll and you do what you can to get these people to accept the fact that it may not be easy, but it’s going to be something you can do. And we’re getting those success stories. They’re graduating. Wasn’t the last mayor of Brockton a Massasoit graduate—not the current one but like two years ago? She’s now on the Board of Trustees. We have students that are on the Board of Trustees; we have current students who are on the Board of Trustees. We have at least one, and they get awards from all over the nation. And they’re coming but they’re also coming from more third-world than we’re used to. We used to get people from Haiti who were very well-

educated. I remember having a Cuban lady with a master's degree, but it was in Spanish, and she had to try and learn how to do it in English. And it was very, very tough to be dropped in the middle of English Comp when you've got all these degrees in another language and don't have that familiarity with the new language that you're going to be taking. And it's awfully tough to say to somebody with a master's degree or more that you're not reacting at the level of writing English that you need in order to have a degree in an English-speaking country. And so that's different, but we're getting lots of three-language students who embarrass [the ] Hell out of me when it comes to how poor my French pronunciation is, particularly because I used to make a dollar for every commercial I would read in French when I was working at the television station in Vermont. They thought I was good in French, but when I come up against my Haitian French speakers, no, they don't think that's very—they think it's funny more than anything else.

**Rudolph:** [*laughs*] Let's get back to your teaching a little bit. There is much in literature about the changes about teaching in academia. For example, from lecture-based to a guide-on-the-side. And you've touched on this a little bit. But saying that you really like to be the sage on the stage, and I understand that. How have your teaching techniques changed or not changed and why? And what influenced you to be the sage on the stage if that's where you are right now?

**[0:52:08]**

**Elliott-Smith:** [*sigh*] The first time somebody asked me to explain what do I want to do, how do I want to teach, I had no idea. And it took me about three months to come up with an answer, and I had to come up with an answer in three months because I was taking a course in education. I came up with what I thought was a good way to explain it. If you've ever watched a hockey game, you've seen a hockey referee drop the puck in the middle of the ice and jump backwards so that the two hockey players can go at it. I think if I was going to characterize my teaching, I would say I'm a hockey referee. I get 'em started, hope that they're going in the right direction, try to remind them what the purpose of this whole thing is all about. The purpose is to put the puck in the net. The purpose is not to fight. The purpose is to skate very, very well like Bobby Orr, who could kill a two-

minute or a five-minute penalty just by circling away from anybody from the other team. Just always remember what the purpose is and then stick to it. If you're a good referee, you'll always be able to remind them; you'll be on the ice steering them away from the corners. Lots of people need to find out what is education? What is study? What do you mean I have to be able to answer tests? This is the material you need to know in order to say that you've ever taken a course in philosophy. Socratic method has to mean something. Plato has to mean something, and it's not play dough—p-l-a-y—but there's always somebody who wants to do that, but they've got to have the right vocabulary. What got me going in that direction? Mmm, I'm going to say my father. I haven't talked about my parents or my siblings yet. My father was a storyteller. He didn't read to me when I was four years old or five years old, he told me the story of Swiss Family Robinson. And when he told me the story of Swiss Family Robinson, it included the mammoth caves underneath the island. Caves big enough to have German submarines in them. And there were elephants that had to be trained to shoot cannon off their back without being excited about the fact that you were shooting cannon off the—. He had elephants. He had submarines. He had getting rid of the submarines. We were fighting the second World War. When I was four years old, it was 1940. Britain was fighting a war. Poland had been invaded, and I was four. I had a map of the world, and I used to throw darts at Berlin. I also threw darts at Japan, and my father introduced me to imagination. Only I didn't know it was imagination until at the age of 12, I read *Swiss Family Robinson*. What a disappointment. My father's version was much better. Much better. Where was I at twelve? It was 1946. I graduated grammar school in '49, and that was the beginning of the Korean War. And I had a brother who was about to go back in to fly in Korea, and maybe life was always serious, and I wanted to be able to get things accomplished, rather than try to get things accomplished. And there's a significant difference there. You can try and try and try, but you've got to be successful or you're not being successful. And that probably motivated me to provide them with what they needed to be successful in philosophy. What they needed to understand if they're going to look at T.S. Elliott, they had to realize that his ability to paint pictures with words, to create moods with words. Edgar Allen Poe could scare the bejesus out of anybody. He created an emotion just by using words. He didn't describe things literally; he did it

intellectually and psychologically. That was important and I think it still is important, and that's what I think students have got to take away with them. A few years ago, before I was aged out of the military because I retired, I had a lieutenant who graduated from a very well-known university and ROTC, and I said, "What were you studying when you graduated from X University?" and she said, "Oh, my minor was in dance."

And I said, "Oh. What kind of dance?"

"Oh," she said, "Folk dancing and square dancing and ethnic dancing."

And I said, "Oh yeah, yeah." And I said, "What about your major?"

"Oh," she said, "That was something that worked in very nicely with all my dance. I did a lot of physical education."

I said, "Oh. Yeah. What kind of subject matter did you take? Philosophy?"

"No."

"Literature?"

"No. No, no, I danced a lot."

And God help us; she's an officer out there, and she holds lives in her hands, and she learned how to dance. And I'm delighted that she learned how to dance. I never did dance with her nor did I want to. But that kind of education background scares the Hell out of me. Is that existing here on this campus? No, although there have been stories about some of the exotic things that happened over the years. Why do I teach the way I do? I think maybe because intellectual pictures are very important, and you've got to deal with subject matter to do that.

**[0:59:23]**

**Rudolph:** Well, I think going right along with that, I'm going to ask you this next question, which concentrates on literature. And the wonderful thing about literature is that a classic will always remain a classic. However, there are always new classics being added. And how has this affected your primary source choices for use in your classes? Now you're talking a lot about words as being pictures.

**Elliott-Smith:** Yeah, I'm an old fashioned traditionalist. I think I want to spend a lot of time dealing with Mark Twain; a lot of time with Ernest Hemingway; a lot of time with Emily Dickinson. When doing that, I'm also dealing with classical presentation. If we're going to talk about Walt Whitman and the fact that he's breaking lots and lots of standards and lots and lots of rules, then we should spend some time talking about what are the rules that he's breaking. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense to talk about how he breaks them. Maybe they should know a little about iambic pentameter and realize that Shakespeare had a way and a method and it worked. And you're going to find that in other things. Iambic pentameter isn't just Shakespeare; it's across all of traditional poetry. And literature is ancient and as it grows older, it doesn't get senile; it merely gets broader. I like tradition. I hate to think of getting through introductory courses without being introduced to tradition as opposed to putting people into introductory courses and teaching them specialization when they haven't had tradition. Am I ready to fight for that? Yeah, but that's part of being in any modern department in any subject matter. And it doesn't matter whether I'm teaching government or whether I'm teaching literature or whether I'm teaching pottery. It's nice to know a little bit about the standards of beauty for the Greeks and standards of beauty for the Romans, and my pottery people playing with clay learn that. We had one-hour and fifteen-minute class, and then we had two classes so we could total up to four hours so that when we're actually getting dirty, we knew what it was that we were trying to improve on—or at least I tell myself that.

**Rudolph:** [*laughs*] Now you've taught English. You've taught philosophy. You've taught history and government. You've taught speech and ceramics. I was going to ask you about similarities and differences, so that's quite a wide range of different courses, but maybe thinking about your approach—is your approach the same in all of these? Is it different?

**Elliott-Smith:** Oh, Lordy, Lordy. I believe it's important to try and get a class to laugh at least once a week. Laughter relaxes a lot of stress. And day-to-day classroom, if I'm going to lecture a lot, I'm stressing them a lot. Are they getting all of this down? Do they have to memorize pages of this stuff that he's throwing at us? If they find themselves laughing right in the middle of that anxiety, they're less anxious. And if you're less anxious, I think—I believe that I can get more teaching done. I can't make them

appreciate middle age, and T.S. Elliot talks about middle age, and he does it when he's twenty some odd years old, and he can make middle aged people say, Yeah, you're right. I know that. I know what that means. Because by middle age they've had that psychological thing that

**[1:05:39]:** happens to middle-age people. How do you make people understand that which they can't understand through knowledge because they haven't experienced it yet? The best example I can deal with is with Emily Dickinson. She never ceases to be amazing. She can create an understanding of things that nobody can understand. And that sounds like it's mysticism and it isn't. She just knows how to press buttons. [paraphrasing Dickinson's poem #258] There's a certain mood on a winter's day that adds the heft of organ tunes. There's a certain heft—a heaviness of an organ when you're out in the woods in the wintertime? But there's no organ out there, and how can gray be heavy? And yet, she can make you wonder about a mood that being in the woods on a winter's day can bring you—[*long pause*—how do you make people understand that which they won't be old enough to understand for another twenty years? An awful lot of people do it. Mark Twain does it all the time. Hemingway said, All literature in America started with Twain and hasn't gotten any better since. And when you read Twain, you understand Huck a little bit, and you haven't been twelve years old and sat on a raft in the middle of the Mississippi, probably you haven't, I'm guessing [*laughs*]. I had been on a raft or two but not on the Mississippi because I lived in Florida. What is Hemmingway talking about? I've been to a bull fight. I'm never going to be able to go to another one probably because they're not going to be allowable anywhere pretty soon because they're inhumane. Does that mean I can't understand what it's like to almost die when the bull's horn goes by a half an inch off my hip bone? And that I've got to be able to stand there and not flinch because that is what being a man is all about? But that isn't what being a man is all about. It's having the courage to admit that you're afraid. And that's being what a man is all about. Do some of my students understand fear? Yeah. And going back to '66 when I was dealing with Vietnam and when I was dealing with second World War and Korean people who were veterans from Korea. Today, Afghanistan gives us a lot of fear. And it's not an awful lot different than World War II when mothers had stars in their window, and the gold star was the most significant and everybody honored it. But it also

meant that a son or father died, and you prayed for little blue and white stars. I play tennis with a lady whose son is a—I don't know if I even have a title for what he does because he just goes out and disappears—he's not a Seal, but he's equivalent to, and that's all I know about it, and that's all she'll tell me. But she wears the star all the time—the little blue star—and she knows what fear is. The phone rings and she's hoping to God that it's him, he found a phone somewhere and called to say, Hi Mom. I'm okay. And does she happen to get that once every year or once every six months and she's glad to get it when she gets it because you just cross your fingers and hope, but her son is happy doing what he wants to do? I have parents in my classes now whose sons are overseas. It's a tough life. How do you teach that mood to somebody who doesn't have anybody overseas? Emily Dickinson said there's certain heft of light on a winter's day, and she hears organ music—or feels it in the woods. I don't how she does it. I have tried it; I can understand a mood coming from the color of the sky, but I certainly can't write poetry about it. Can I make my students understand it? I think some of them. Can I win 'em all? No. No, you can't win all the battles.

**Rudolph:** Someone once said to me that I'm a teacher; I just know how to explain things to students. That is a big thing.

**Elliott-Smith:** Oh boy. And I tell my kids, Look if I didn't make sense, ask me again. Let me try a different way. My job is to go back and find as many different ways of trying until you hit one that you understand. That's my job. I've got to find out how to make it easy. And it's not going to be easy. So, your friend was saying good things. How do you explain? Keep on going until you find a method that works. Because they'll come up with some of the unusual comments. I mean, you never know what they're going to tell you next. I try never to be outwardly surprised by things that people tell me. So, why aren't you doing so-and-so and so-and-so when it comes to these terrible crimes? And I say, You'd be surprised how fast it will work once the newspapers get it, and two days later, we had a new law on the books in Boston—what did he call it? Up skirting?

**[1:10:49]**

**Rudolph:** Yes.

**Elliott-Smith:** Two days after they decided to get that solved, it was solved, and a new law existed. Did I have fun last Tuesday a week ago saying, Well, did it happen? Yeah [*changing vocal tone*], it really did happen. They could make a law if they wanted to. [*end of change of vocal tone*] And then trying to explain Proposition 2½ when you're dealing with students who never have to worry about paying taxes, not at their age. But what did Proposition 2½—what was it like? If a school committee said they wanted \$42 million, they got it. And they go to the nearest judge, and he'd say, Take it. Proposition 2½ stopped that. My students don't want to believe that there was actually a law that prevented people from getting all the money they wanted. How do you convince people that it's important not to go broke? Or like a gentleman that I met who lived in Middleborough, and they raised his tax money on his house. And he said, "That's ridiculous. I can't pay that." And they said, Well then you have to sell. So he went out and got into his tractor, and he pulled the house down and then dragged all the wood away and burned it. He said, "Okay. You can have the house now." Is that real? It's real if you haven't got enough money to pay for it. Every time I got my oil burners filled this winter, it's cost me over \$1000. What about people who haven't got a regular job? Or a steady job? I don't know how they're paying. I really don't. [*now addressing his grandson, who is in the room*] You surviving? Okay. You're looking restless, and I'm getting the feeling either he has to go to the bathroom or he didn't understand something. No, okay. I fed him! His mother would appreciate the fact that I fed him. [*JR laughs*]

**Rudolph:** What part do you think the college pays in this community and its communities outside of Brockton?

**Elliott-Smith:** Oh boy. When they came up with the concept of community colleges, and I always want to say it's one person when it's really somebody else. It's not Volpe[phonetic] who started it. It's Foster Furcolo who also, by the way, was a representative in Washington and who wrote a terrific book about the Russian invasion into Poland and the destruction and killing all of the Polish professors in the military colleges. Amazing story. Anyway, Furcolo did a good job on that. The idea being that there should be a college close enough so anybody in Massachusetts would be able to travel there and back. A commuter college such that nobody was further than twenty-five miles away from a good community college run by the state. And because it was going to

cost a lot of money, it would only be two-year schools, but they would fill in the spaces where the ten teachers' colleges were unable to reach so they could get ready to push them into that. In other words, the idea of the community college was: make that education available. Inexpensive because you didn't have to pay for dorms; you didn't have to pay for meals outside the house. Inexpensive because you didn't have to wear special clothes. Do you always have to wear a tie when you went out to the paternity meeting? You were doing this cut rate, and you were doing it while you were also working to keep yourself financially able to pay for it. Community colleges in general provide the best bargain in education, higher education that there exists in the world. There's never going to be a better bargain than that. Our students that come from overseas can't believe that if you can just get by with paying in-state tuition, this an easy thing to do. It's not a cinch, but with a little bit of help—a little bit of a job here, and a job there, you can pay your way through with this thing.

And that's something you couldn't do if you wanted to go to let's say University of Massachusetts at Amherst. That's just that more expensive, but they've got a lot more building to build out there because they've also got to pay for the dorms. University of Vermont, my alma mater stopped playing baseball because they couldn't afford to send their baseball players down to Florida and still be able to bring them back up and have them because you can't play in the snow, and you can't play indoors. And that they couldn't play football indoors, not back in those days, nor did Vermont think that they could ever build an indoor football field. And so they stopped football before they even graduated in '61. Football had ceased to exist—but they play hockey, and they play hockey very well because all you have to do is carry your skates and your stick. But football is very expensive. How much does it cost to put one football player on the field with all of his equipment, his uniforms, his shoes, the whole thing? In 1962, it cost \$400 to put a high school football player on the field—just his equipment. That was 1962. Today, it's almost \$4000. I mean, the field has to have lights because they're playing at night, and they have to have electronic scoreboards, and they've got to have a doctor on the field to make certain that nobody's getting a concussion, and it's getting more and more and more complicated. And their insurance now is much higher than it used to be. They'll be more universities shutting down football unless they've got a field complete,

ready to go so that they can double up. When your other team is visiting, you can be at home and vice versa. But MIT quit football. They have in-house football, but they don't compete. There may be some junior varsity competition, but they'd rather deal with squash because you don't have to carry the building with you, and the racquet only cost \$29.

**[1:18:10]**

**Rudolph:** [*laughs*] What do you see as some of the college's biggest accomplishments here?

**Elliott-Smith:** [*long pause*] Having students light up like a Christmas tree because they just caught it. They just understood. And when you see that sparkle, you know you're doing something right. You may not know what it is, but you did something right 'cause all of a sudden they sit back and say, I'll be damned. That's a generalized—we're doing that widespread. There are people wandering around who say, You know I still use that stuff you taught me in English Comp I. I run across them when I'm playing tennis with old fogies; and I'm an old fogie and I play with old fogies. And I run into my students from 1966 and 1967 and 1968, and I do that two or three times a year I'm running into some of my students from back when. And they all say, That was the greatest thing that ever happened when I went to Massasoit; I didn't think I'd ever go to college. And somebody pushed, and it was my Uncle Charlie or it was somebody, and somebody pushed and I went to college and by God, you people at Massasoit turned me around. And that's the great accomplishment. It doesn't happen to be buildings. The fact that we've won national championships in baseball and soccer. That's kind of neat. I helped coach a women's volleyball team, and we went to Miami for a week because we made the Sweet Sixteen, the final sixteen of the nation. Could we compete at that level? No. But we went, and we will be able to brag about that for the rest of our lives. The Sweet Sixteen? The top sixteen teams in the country? And that year, the baseball team came in first in the country also. And who is the coach? Tommy Frizzell, one of our own. Graduated from Massasoit. And by the way, spent after he graduated with his master's degree and was teaching in Brockton, had a wall fall on him and paralyzed him for life. And he's still out there, and he's still baseball coach, and he's still winning

championships, and he made the Hall of Fame for junior colleges. And those are great accomplishments. It brought reality down to human size. I mean, you can get a great education in Brockton four blocks from where you live. You can get a great education and a great experience at a college, meeting people who are as different as you are from the person down the street. We've always had diversity; it's not something new. We've always had people say, You're from New York City and you were a Yankee fan? Well, yeah, but that just goes to show that some Yankee fans aren't all bad. And I'm a Red Sox fan now. You want to know what Pedroia did yesterday? He was two for three; he had two great line drives: a single and a double. Yeah, I'm a big Red Sox fan. And do you really think that a Yankee fan be converted? Yeah, it happens. And people do go to college even though their father was a milkman. My father never finished college. My mother never went to school. She grew up in Poland in the coal mines, the coal fields of Pennsylvania. And her father is down on the bottom of one of those mines. The coal miner's daughter, in essence, brought up her brothers and sisters and her family. I'm a first-generation of my family to go to college. My brother Paul went to Fordham; my sister went to Columbia; my brother Don went to Princeton. So we didn't do too bad for first-generation kids. Who are we the progeny of? A guy who couldn't get out of Harvard; he got in, but he couldn't get out, and mother who spoke Polish until she was seven and then learned English and did it without having any accent. That's what we do around here all the time. When I talk about my family, people say, Holy cow—that's different. Well, that's what Brockton is, different because of Massasoit. We're different. We've made different things happen. Fifty-five years ago, did we talk about doing what we're doing? We didn't dream about it. And now we do 'cause we can. Because we can and it works. So, what great things do we do? We fulfill dreams, and that sounds awfully spiritual, but it is because it works and it happens. Listen to these kids talk about what it was like to come here, and they're thrilled to talk about it. And we've got good kids who are making a name for themselves, not just in Brockton but all around.

**[1:24:05]:** I have a student [*quoting conversation*], I'm sorry I'm not going to be in class next Friday.

What are you doing now?

Well, I'm going down to Washington again because I've been selected for—[*pause*]

And she grew up in downtown Brockton, single mother, and she's going to Washington again. And that's great.

**Rudolph:** Well, I hate to ask you about the disappointments because the accomplishments were so great, but do you have any disappointments?

**Elliott-Smith:** [*pause*] No, not without being facetious as Hell. No. I've led a real good life, and I like it.

**Rudolph:** And what about the college? Do you think the college has any disappointments?

**Elliott-Smith:** Individually—

**Rudolph:** Or even challenges. [*talking at same time*] We'll call them challenges.

**Elliott-Smith:** I guess we can't win everything. And I'm talking academically rather than sports-wise. We can't win 'em all. Nobody can. But we fight like hell, and we seem to win a lot more than we lose, so every loss is a disappointment. But no, you've got to figure it on what we're doing right, and we're doing so much more right than not; that is what we should be spending our time on. Does that mean that we ignore the fact that we don't always win? No. But, fighting on is a good way as good a way to deal with the occasional losses as possible 'cause it demonstrates that we can win. We can.

**Rudolph:** Okay. This is kind of philosophical, fits right in with your career. For what would you like to be remembered here at Massasoit?

**Elliott-Smith:** [*sigh/pause*] First of all, I want a picture painted by my office mate Sam—who's not my office mate anymore—because his pictures are super. They look like, Boy, there's somebody important. And so Sam can make me important, or looking anyway. What do I want to be remembered for? [*sigh*] I'd go out of my way to answer a lot of questions. Keep on asking. Let me try and find another way. What does that mean? I've always appreciated a professor who was available, and there were professors who were never available. I don't think we have too many of them if we have any at all now, but it happens. It happens because people live lives outside of their immediate job that they get distracted by other aspects of life, but life, it can be very distracting. What do I

want to be remembered for? I love my subject matter. I really love my subject matter. That makes it easy to talk about. It means I have a pretty easy job. How can you not, obviously I know how you cannot, but how can I not truly just walk out on top of a cloud because I just had a great hour with Emily Dickinson? I just had an hour and fifteen minutes with T.S. Elliott. God, that was fun.

**Rudolph:** Is it the fact of passing that love of that subject matter onto others?

**Elliott-Smith:** Well, it's funny, I took Sam over to my office; he'd never seen it before, and he needed to know what my office looks like because he knows what my house looks like. And I showed him a blue coffee mug that I got from a student of mine from oh God, 1980 maybe. Shirley Cowa[phonetic], only now she's Shirley Cowa[phonetic] Jump. Born and raised in Whitman. Went to Whitman High School—Whitman Hanson, came to Massasoit, was a student of mine in Comp and American Lit. and Philosophy and graduated and went to Columbia University, met a guy, married him, moved out to Indiana, and she writes books. She's published twenty-two books, and I keep trying to get some of them to be on our bookshelves because they're funny. And, not only are they funny, but they're good. And she always slips in something from T.S. Elliott, but you kind of have to be an English major to understand. And she's writing for women predominantly because they're romance novels. And she expects that ninety percent of her readers are women, and she said of that ninety percent, sixty-five percent are English majors, so yeah, I throw a little bit of this, a little bit of that because you prepared me well. So I read her books because I'm looking for Emily Dickinson or I'm looking for T.S. Elliott, and they're there, and they're there. That's kind of a wondrous thing. She is a best-seller for *U.S.A. Today* and the *New York Times* Book reviews; she's out there and all you have to do is look up Shirleyjump.com, blue-eyed blonde from Whitman, and she went to school here the same time that Dave Hirschy's daughter went here. I had the two of them in class. Oh my God. I don't think I've ever in my life ever had two students who had read that much that I could make just a little reference to and they'd jump up and say, How about—and they were right in the middle of a discussion because they had read all of that before. And the kids who hadn't read it were going, It looks like you're having fun; maybe I should read too. And I don't know, what was I answering? [laughing]

[1:31:22]

**Rudolph:** About what you would like to be remembered. How you would like to be remembered [*talking at same time*], yes.

**Elliott-Smith:** What would I like to be remembered—somebody who really gave a damn about the subject matter and the student body. You know, it was getting the two together. It's not as easy as Scotch tape.

**Rudolph:** [*laughs*] No, it isn't. Are there any things that you would like to talk about that I haven't asked you?

**Elliott-Smith:** We didn't talk an awful lot about the military. I'm very proud of my military background. The fact that I have two or three or four military in every class I've got right now is good. I'm very pleased that I give [\_\_\_\_\_] the lowest rank has to be in charge of reminding me of what time it is. So the lowest ranking veteran in class, you're a corporal? Alright, you're lowest. Make sure I have ten minutes to wrap up and also read attendance. Your job, if you mess up, is going to have an effect, and I frown at him. They love it. They love it. They also like having me make a fuss about the fact that I've got veterans in my class. And they kind of like being in class and knowing that people are checking 'em out. I like that. And if I were one of 'em, I would. The first time I was ever in college, I had an amazing English Comp teacher. When I found out later, when the second World War ended, she was the highest ranking WAC in Europe, Women's Army Corps. She was a bird colonel, and she looked like a bird colonel, and she walked in and said, "My name is Betty Vandel[phonetic]. We're here to work," and boy we worked. English Comp. And the first time we wrote a paper, she said, "Alright. Here's the assignment," and she read out [\_\_\_\_\_] "Alright, here's one of the answers," and she read my paper out loud, and I was floating because that was mine, and it was good and she said, "Straight-A. Well, no, it's not really a straight-A. it's an "A" over an "F". "A" for brilliantly written and "F" because he doesn't know how to spell. [*JR laughs*]. And that's the way it went for a whole year. And she only died about three years ago, and the fact that I never wrote her and said, "Speaking as somebody who got out of the army seven days before that class, thank you." But she made it easy for me. She was a veteran. She found out instantly that I was a veteran, and she made sure that it was well-known. I

thought that was terrific. We had forty-four veterans who were freshman at University of Vermont that year. We're all in the same floor of a dorm, and there were just forty-four of us. Forty-two of the forty-four graduated. I don't know what happened to the other two—we just lost track of them. Maybe I should try to Google 'cause Google finds people. But my military background is something I'm very proud of. That's important. Did it help me when it came to being a college professor? It helped me teach how to deal with people who are different. I lived down South for four years in high school and then two more years in Oklahoma and Texas working in hospitals and all of that that six years happened while Jim Crow laws were in force. I never went to school with anybody who was of color until I got to college, and at the time University of Vermont was very proud—Vermont was very proud of their wonderful racial relations, and I had a professor who said, "Never forget, there are only forty-four black people in the state of Vermont. Is it a wonder that we have great racial relations?" Forty-four in the whole state? And we're supposed to be proud of that? Why don't they come here? We had two people of color, one of whom Bill Perkins was the president of the student body, and he was also the only black man in one of the fraternities TEP [Tau Epsilon Phi] House. *[laughs]* I was reading the yearbook the other night and saw him and it was funny to see it. The world has changed a lot.

Do we still have diversity problems? This week, at least two episodes of anti-Semitism. Is that enough to cause anxiety? Yeah, yeah. I found out when I was thirty that my mother's father was a Jew and that he lost his brothers and his uncles to Auschwitz. I didn't realize that was part of my heritage. My mother didn't want to talk about it. She was, you know, the newest kid in town. She was a Polack who came over on a boat and no education. Did she want to talk about being Polish? No. Any more than you want to talk about being a Mexican or a Tex-Mex or an alien or illegal alien. This college makes a lot of diversity not worthy of the discussion because we're getting along with each other quite well. Are there problems? There are always problems 'cause you're dealing with human beings. And think of the people you don't understand and probably never will. And think of the people I don't understand and probably never will. Is it easier now than it was fifty years ago? Yeah, yeah. My granddaughter took a course in calculus down at UMass Dartmouth and she got a 100 on that first test in calculus, and I said, "Oh my God.

That's a fantastic accomplishment. I can't even spell calculus." And she laughed and she said, "You know what's important about that 100?" and I said, "What?" [*whispering*] "I beat out three Asians." You understand that better than I do because you've got Asians to compete with, don't you? [*directing question to grandson who was present in the room during the interview*] He's in engineering. Many? When your mother graduated from UMass Dartmouth, SMU, we sat and listened to all the graduates, and they were all getting PhDs in engineering and physics. But they had for the most part American names. They were starting to have Russians back then. That was in [*mumbling sound*] '86. What have you got now to compete with? Vietnamese?

[1:39:33]

**Sam:** We had Mongolians last year.

**Elliott-Smith:** Yeah.

**Sam:** They all transferred out to better universities like Harvard and Princeton.

**Elliott-Smith:** Yeah, yeah. Have you got any other?

**Sam:** We have a lot of—well, there's two Venezuelans in my suite. My roommate's Vietnamese. The other one's Dutch.

**Elliott-Smith:** Dutch citizens? I had a Fin who was a veteran 'cause we were all veterans, forty-four of us. I had a guy who was in the Finnish army, and I had a guy who was in the Israeli army. Why was he here? Because, he said, "I can get cheaper coaching in violin here than anywhere else in the world." Yehskil Rasio[phonetic]. And he played the violin at night. That was his study. It was magnificent because it was beautiful music, but he wasn't appreciated by everybody in the dorm. Diversity at the moment is more important than how much diversity we had back in 1966. We have as much problems with different people here and now as we did fifty years ago. I went to high school in Miami Beach, Florida. People of color were not allowed there after dusk and before dawn. They were trucked off the island. You weren't allowed to be on. That was Jim Crow. Where'd they go to school? They didn't go to school in Miami Beach. When I was in Oklahoma, there was black and there was white. And a lot of Mexicans. And they were separate from black and white, but that was Jim Crow law. [*sniffing*] is diversity a

problem? Or human beings a problem? Yeah. So you talk it up and march on. Are we doing a good job on that? Yeah. Yeah. I remember the first time I sang in a choir and guy next to me couldn't sing worth a damn. And all my life, what do you know about black people? They've got great sense of rhythm. This guy was a monotone. He couldn't sing worth a damn. My God, everything that I ever believed, you know, blacks sure do have good rhythm, wasn't true. I learned. Life became less diverse. I was stationed with people in the military [*horn honks in background*] who said, Please don't let them transfer any black man's blood into me. [*pause*] And I dealt with working in the emergency room when some young woman who was nine and a half months pregnant would fill out the paperwork before she went upstairs, and I always would say, "I have to ask you how old are you?"

"I'm seventeen."

And I said, "Is this your first?" that was the next question, Is this your first child.

"No, it's my fourth." And I came from Miami Beach, Florida, where people got brand new Packard convertibles for their sixteenth birthday. And this child was having her fourth child at seventeen. Are there people down South who are doing similar things today? Yeah. Where do they come from? Everywhere. This is this is a good institution for diversity. And I'm glad it is what it is. [*scratching noise*] I've been editing as I've been going along. What I will talk about, I will tell you a story after the mike's off.

**Rudolph:** Oh, alright. I'm going to ask Sam to tell me his last name. We have with us Sam— Ford, who is T.P.'s grandson.

**Sam:** Ford

**Rudolph:** Ford, who is T.P.'s grandson.

**Elliott-Smith:** His mother graduated from Massasoit.

**Rudolph:** And his mother graduated from Massasoit. And you are where now going to school?

**Sam Ford:** UMass Dartmouth.

**Rudolph:** UMass Dartmouth. Alright.

**Elliott-Smith:** Yeah. Lori[phonetic] was here. She graduated, she played softball and volleyball and [pause]. Two funny stories. One, and you really do have to turn that off.

**Rudolph:** Alright. Well first before I turn it off, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me and Sam also for listening. Thank you.

**[1:44:58]**

[end of recording 1]

[beginning of recording 2]

**Rudolph:** This is Jennifer Rudolph, and I'm once again with Professor T.P. Elliott-Smith. And I would like to ask you if you would tell me what makes you proudest? What made you proudest of your work here at Massasoit?

**Elliott-Smith:** It may or may not be the ultimate proud factor, but I'm certainly very proud of the fact that both of my children are graduates of Massasoit Community College. And I had each of them in a course of mine, and I was also able to be the person who handed them their diploma. One time I had to fly back from Washington D.C. I was on active duty in the army. But I flew back and was there for graduation and flew back the next morning, was back on duty again. But yes, the fact that my two kids graduated from Massasoit Community College. First-time try. [both laugh]

**Rudolph:** Well, thank you very much. I think that says a lot about you. About your children and about the school. Thank you.

[end of recording 2]

**[1:46:04]**