

An Interview of Arthur L. Levine Conducted by Michael Whelan

January 12, 2007

BSI Oral History Project

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Interview History

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Arthur Levine

Interviewed by Michael Whelan  
January 12, 2007  
New York City, New York, USA

WHELAN: I'm interviewing Arthur Levine, one of our long time Irregulars, and it is January 12, 2007, and it is the evening of The Baker Street Irregulars dinner. Art, I'd like you to please share with us about your non-Sherlockian world. Where were you born?

LEVINE: I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, November 23, 1929, and I was brought up in Cleveland and moved to New York in, I believe late fifties to attend Columbia University, where I got a PhD. I moved back to Cleveland after completing my studies, except the dissertation, and was there for a couple more years and then I was fortunate enough to get a job with the space agency, NASA, in New York, at Columbia University—they have an installation there—in 1961, and moved back to New York and have been here ever since.

WHELAN: I have a question.

LEVINE: Yes.

WHELAN: What was your PhD in? What was your course of study?

LEVINE: It was called PhD in public law and government, which today is called political science or something of that nature. But at that time, Columbia called it public law and government and it was the study of government, institutions, Congress, presidents, state government, local governments, and so forth.

WHELAN: Now, did you get your undergraduate, graduate, and PhD at Columbia?

LEVINE: No, I got my undergraduate and masters degree at Western Reserve University, which is now called Case Western Reserve. The Case Institute of Technology and Western Reserve merged, in, probably, the early seventies.

WHELAN: My wife graduated from Case.

LEVINE: Really.

WHELAN: From Western Reserve.

LEVINE: Oh, Western Reserve.

WHELAN: Before it was Case. You'll have to talk to her about that.

LEVINE: That is very interesting. That's good.

WHELAN: What was your family composition? Brothers? Sisters?

LEVINE: I had one brother, eight years older than me, and he moved to California about the same time I moved to New York. He was a lawyer, and he decided he wanted to have vaster horizons. He had gone--been in the Service in California, liked it very much there and decided that he would move. So he moved with his wife and infant child to California and got a job there, studied for the bar and eventually became a lawyer and independent practitioner. And he, unfortunately, passed away about four years ago. But we were very close, and we kept in contact, and I visited him frequently in California.

WHELAN: I'm sorry. What were your--what were your parents' backgrounds? What did they do? Was your mom a housewife? What did your father do in Cleveland? Was it in Cleveland or was it outside of Cleveland?

LEVINE: Originally we lived in Cleveland, and then when I went to junior high, we moved to the suburbs, Cleveland Heights, which is a very close suburb. We bought a house there. Originally, we were in rented quarters in a two family house. And my father was a merchant. He owned a store, which sold men's and ladies' ready-to-wear. That's what they called it at that time. And my mother was not really a housewife; she worked with him every day. Her pattern was to make sure the kids got breakfast and off to school. Then she went into the store. And she came home about five o'clock or six o'clock. My father stayed later because the store was open very late, seven days of week. And she came back, made sure the kids had dinner and so forth and so on, but she worked with him in the store.

WHELAN: She was way ahead of her time.

LEVINE: Yes, she was.

WHELAN: Yeah. I imagine she was quite an extraordinary gal?

LEVINE: She was. She was. She gave me the love of literature, music, learning, education. She was great.

WHELAN: Are you like your dad in any regard?

LEVINE: Yes. He was a very, very nice even-tempered, pleasant, happy, person.

WHELAN: Sounds like his son.

LEVINE: Say, that was very nice. (laughter)

WHELAN: Well, we talked about—you know—what you did and you went into this program after you got your PhD.

LEVINE: Right.

WHELAN: Did you do that, I mean for many years or did you retire from that or?

LEVINE: Well. No. Actually before I got my PhD, when I was in Cleveland, I got a job with the—what was called National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics. It was the predecessor of the space agency, NASA. That was an agency that did aeronautical research, and I started there in '55, actually. In '58, it became NASA. It was absorbed into NASA, the whole agency, and I worked there for five years, six years, until I—we transferred to New York, with NASA. I was working with NASA. I stayed with them until 1972, and then I got a job at Baruch College at City University of New York teaching public administration. Basically teaching political science, public administration—teaching the field that I had studied.

WHELAN: It must have been a wonderful career.

LEVINE: Yeah. It was a great career. I enjoyed it very much.

WHELAN: I mean, were you doing administrative work with NASA?

LEVINE: Yes, with NASA I was doing—I had, as administrator—I started out in personnel, which is called human resources now. I was doing all sorts of jobs of that nature, and I was in charge of college recruiting for engineers at one time, which was a very interesting job. There was a big engineering shortage. It was tough to get them, and we had to go all around the country interviewing, inducing them to come, and so forth and so on. So that's what I did, and then when—when I got the job in New York, in 1961, I was a general administrator at the NASA installation at Columbia University, which had just—which was new, it had started at that time, so I was around for—

WHELAN: Sound like you had a lot of people working for you, if you're general administrator.

LEVINE: It was a small installation. So I didn't have that many people, but I had a lot of work and a big budget. And we were, we didn't have anything, we didn't have a facility, we didn't have equipment. We had nothing, so I had to build it up from scratch. (laughs)

WHELAN: I think that's fine (Levine laughs). Don't you?

LEVINE: I learned a great deal.

WHELAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: I learned a great deal.

WHELAN: Have you received any special distinctions, awards, or accolades through your work or other outside activities, like a hobby, or community civic service?

LEVINE: Well. I received some from teaching at the college. In NASA, I got what is called the Apollo Achievement Award; which, was given basically to people who were in the Agency during the Apollo years, and it was very nice because it looks very nice.

WHELAN: That's great. (laughs)

LEVINE: But I didn't really send the astronauts up. But it was nice to have that award, and it was for contributing to the agency's progress during those very important years. And at—when I was at Baruch College, I received what was called the Luther Gulick Award for Outstanding Academician, which was given to a professor who excelled in that field. Luther Gulick was the first city administrator of New York City. It was a position, which is under the mayor. But the idea was to have a professional administrator, and he was well known. He founded the Institute of Public Administration in New York, which was sort of a flagship organization, and the award was named after him. So, those are two things, which I was—you know—kind of proud of.

WHELAN: I would be too. (laughter) I think that is wonderful. When and what age and circumstances did you first connect with Sherlock Holmes? Was there a special person who introduced you or helped you get interested in the canon?

LEVINE: Well. I was about fourteen, and at fourteen, I used to like to go to the Cleveland Public Library. Which, if you know Cleveland at all—your wife probably knows it—was on—right at the lake on Lake Erie, and it's a big building down there, and I would take the streetcar down there myself. You know, we wouldn't worry about security. We just took the streetcar and go. If I could leave on Saturday or Sunday—whenever I could get away—and I would love to roam the open stacks, which is also very unusual. You don't find that in many cities any more—open stacks. So I was looking at the open stacks one day, and I saw a stack called "literature". That's what it was titled. I looked around that stack, and I saw two books. One was *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* by Vincent Starrett and the other was *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Ellery Queen. And I said, "I read"—"I have to read these books." (laughter) I didn't know that he had a private life, and what are misadventures? I was familiar a little bit with the Sherlock Holmes stories because of the movies, the Basil Rathbone movies, which came out in late '30s—I think it was—originally. And then I had read, maybe, a story or two, but I don't remember. But I do remember those two books. And I read those two books very avidly. And in one of the books, I think it was *The Private Life*, they mentioned the Baker Street Irregulars, and they mentioned Christopher Morley as the Gasogene, head of the Baker Street Irregulars. So I wrote him a letter. I said, "I'm interested. Can you tell me how to get involved in the Sherlockian Baker Street movement?" And Edgar Smith wrote me back a letter. I have a copy of the letter here actually. And he said, "Christopher Morley has referred your letter to me, and I'm glad you are going to get

involved.” And he said, “There is no scion in Cleveland, but there is one in Akron with Clifton R. Andrew. He’s the Gasogene of the Scandalous Bohemians, and you should contact him.” So I did, and I kept a correspondence with Smith, and he always answered. He answered like the next day, on a post card. He would write in a small hand—he would write the postcard and send it off. So I got in touch with Andrew, and Andrew invited me to a meeting in Akron, and I told him that I couldn’t get there because I didn’t drive, and my parents were busy. So he drove thirty miles to Cleveland, picked me up, took me to the meeting in Akron. We had the meeting one evening, took me back, and this continued for a while.

WHELAN: What a wonderful man.

LEVINE: Yes, he was a great man. He was wonderful, very interesting person.

LEVINE: Then, when I got a little older, he said, “Why don’t you come to a meeting with the BSI?” I said, “I would like to.” He said, “Okay, I’ll pick you up at home, and we’ll drive to New York,” which is what we did. I was maybe seventeen, eighteen, I don’t remember. It was probably ‘52 or ‘53. So I may have been a little older, maybe twenty-one to twenty-two. And he—we drove, and we talked Sherlock Holmes all the way. From the first time—moment I got in the car (laughter), until he took me back after the weekend, and that’s all we talked about because that is all he talked about. I think he had no other interests; that was my feeling. His job was a hotel clerk, a night clerk in a hotel. And he kept himself very busy on that job—which must have been lonely a lot of the time—by the Sherlock Holmes stories and these meetings and so forth. So that’s all we talked about, and I got a great deal of knowledge from him about the Holmes stories, and Doyle, and everything else. So he brought me to the meeting, and he introduced me to some people, and it was very nice. And then I started to be more active.

WHELAN: How many people were in the meetings, when you attended the first meeting?

LEVINE: About sixty, I think.

WHELAN: Sixty.

LEVINE: Sixty to seventy, but I think the early ones were less, but it was sixty.

WHELAN: Okay

LEVINE: Sixty, originally the idea was one member for each story. And each investiture was limited to that.

WHELAN: That’s true. Did they have any special seating arrangements?

LEVINE: Yes, they did have special seating arrangements. (laughter)

WHELAN: Tell us about it.

LEVINE: The seating arrangement was that, there was a long table like this one, only longer. And there were two tables and each table, which we were seated by the seniority of membership. So the younger members sat at the end like we are sitting here, and the older members sat up in front. So, as—over the years, as members died or didn't attend for one reason or another, you could move up. And we all would like to move up, but the problem is—we knew once we moved up, we were in danger, because the farther you got up to the close, the less chance you had of surviving (laughter).

WHELAN: That's great.

LEVINE: I know.

WHELAN: It was kind of a mixed blessing. (laughter)

LEVINE: Mixed blessing. It was very funny. And so—that was the seating arrangement. I was always down at the bottom and we kind of moved up together, the members who were on that end of the totem pole.

WHELAN: Well, one of the questions was, and you already answered it; How did you become familiar with the BSI, and did you have a particular mentor that introduced you? And Cliff Andrew was kind of a legendary figure because he would come to the dinners, and he didn't have a whole lot of money.

LEVINE: That's right.

WHELAN: He would sometimes not—I don't know—did someone say, "He slept in his car one time, and he used the money that he was going to stay in a hotel to buy books." Is that possible?

LEVINE: I wouldn't have been surprised. He didn't—when I went with him, he didn't sleep in the car. Now where did I stay? Well, see we had relatives in New York, and I could stay with them at the time. So I think I stayed—I don't remember staying in a hotel, but I think I stayed with the relatives at that time. I don't—maybe he did sleep in a car, because I didn't—wasn't aware of that.

WHELAN: Now, Morley died in what, '57 or thereabouts?

LEVINE: I think that is right.

WHELAN: Can you give us some of your memories of some of the notable Irregulars of the time?

LEVINE: Yes.

WHELAN: Like Rex Stout and Ellery Queen and whoever else you think about.

LEVINE: Okay. Well. Morley, I never—I saw Morley, I think once, at a meeting. He was ill for much of the fifties, as I remember. In looking at the minutes of the *Baker Street Journals* for those years. They always said Rex Stout took over for him and he was ill and so forth and so on. So, as I recall—I saw him at one meeting, very early. I think I came to my first meeting in '52 or '53, probably '52, and I think he may have been there then, I don't remember. And I couldn't—I'll have to go back in the journals and find that out, but after that, he wasn't there at all. Now Rex Stout, I remember very well. He presided at the meetings a lot. He was very funny. He gave that famous paper, "Watson was a Woman".

WHELAN: Were you there?

LEVINE: Yeah, I was there.

WHELAN: What was your reaction?

LEVINE: Everybody booed and laughed. (laughter). And then when—when they did a toast to Doctor Watson's second wife, he always abstained from the toast because he didn't believe that Watson had a wife, because he was a woman. And so he abstained from the toast. (Whelan laughs)

WHELAN: So he played it...

LEVINE: He played it.

WHELAN: All the way through.

LEVINE: That's right.

WHELAN: Was he kind of a larger than life personality?

LEVINE: Ah, he was — he was a very vigorous personality, he was not a heavy—he was not—he was not Nero Wolfe. He was a slim man, with a beard

WHELAN: But with the beard he had—a kind of a look, a persona.

LEVINE: A persona, yes.

WHELAN: I just wondered if his manner was the same as his—the way he looked.

LEVINE: Yeah. It was. It was. You know, he was charismatic—had charisma. He had charisma, and he was very into it. He was the center of attention, when he talked.

WHELAN: Did he like being the center of attention?

LEVINE: I think he liked it. I think he enjoyed it.



WHELAN: Are there other Irregulars at the time that you remember?

LEVINE: Well, I remember Fletcher Pratt pretty well. He was another beard in the three beards: Morley, Rex Stout and Fletcher Pratt at one time. And he was around when he saw two of them. He was there. I remember him fairly well—you know. He was also a leader. I don't remember specific incidents about him, but I do remember him. And, of course Edgar Smith is the one I remember most because I had a lot of contact with him. I think in the speech I gave last year, I told how when I first, the first time we came to the meeting, to the dinner, I was there with Cliff Andrew a little early, and by that time I think I was twenty-one or twenty-two. I was driving by that time although—but I came with Andrew. But any way—he saw me. I was standing some place in the back, and he walked in with a great rush because he was thinking he was late, coming from General Motors and all the work he did and so forth. He's looking around, and he looks at me, and he says—he throws me the keys to his car and says to me, "Here, park my car." So...

WHELAN: A man used to leadership. (laughs)

LEVINE: That's right. So I said, "Okay." I found a parking spot eventually. I came back, and he thanked me, and the next year, same thing happens. I came—he came in, rushing in, and he looked at me, he says, "Park my car." So I parked his car for him about three years in a row, when he came into the dinner. And, when I got my investiture in 1955, I said, "This is going to read 'Parker, the Vicar of Norwalk'" (laughter) for the park.

WHELAN: Was he a genial man? I always had the impression—

LEVINE: He was very.

WHELAN: — that he was just a warm person, that had—as you were talking about Rex Stout, a real high level of charisma and respect from the organization.

LEVINE: Yes he did. No, he was very warm. He was always warm. He was always affable. I never saw him angry. I never saw him out of sorts. He was just great. I mean—everything about him exuded warmth, and pleasantness, and happiness. It was amazing. He was very, very wonderful in that respect.

WHELAN: Well maybe you can recount that story, because I don't know if we got that on tape last year or not, but it—I loved your story about how you went up there, up to General Motors, the headquarters in New York.

LEVINE: I sent Julie the copy of my speech, so she has it for the archives. Anyway. Yeah—basically what happened is this. We were visiting relatives in New York, Long Island, and I was driving back, myself, and I got to New Jersey and the car started to clank, and terrible noises. Somehow I had the oil changed the day before, and they forgot to put the plug back in, and there was no oil in the car. So, I had to stop. And I called the service station back in Valley Stream, where we were staying, and I said, "I'm stuck." They said, "That's all right,

we'll send a tow truck and we'll tow you." So, that's what they did. In the meantime I came back to Long Island, and they said, "It would take a few days to repair . You need a new motor." Okay, it's expensive—anyway—and they wouldn't admit any fault, naturally. So I said, I had three days, what was I going to do? I said the thing to do was to call Edgar Smith to see if I can see him because we had corresponded, met him a few times. I called him, and I got his secretary and said my name and so forth, and I said, "Could I come to see Mr. Smith?" So she contacted him, and she came back and she says, "Would two o'clock tomorrow be convenient?" So I said, "I would come all the same no how, no matter how inconvenient." And, I came, and I was very, very nervous about it because, you know, this to me would be a great meeting. So I took the Long Island Railroad, the subway in, went to—got to the building—1775 Broadway—General Motors Building, and I was too nervous to go up, so I kept walking back and forth on the street until I got my courage to go up. So, I finally went up to 1800, the eighteen floor. I come into the office and there are three secretaries typing, furiously typing. And I looked around and they looked at me and said, "You must be the messenger; do you have more copy for us?" "No, I'm not the messenger," I said, "I have an appointment with Mr. Smith." "Oh, you must be the young Sherlockian," they said, "Just a minute, I'll see if Mr. Smith is free." So, the lead secretary went out of the office. And I said, what could they be typing? I mean, they were so assiduous and concentrated. So I took a glance, and I thought, there must be a crisis in Buick sales (laughter), there must be a currency crunch in Europe. And I looked at it, and there it was, the copy for the *Baker Street Journal*. That's what they were typing.

WHELAN: That's wonderful.

LEVINE: So, I waited out there, and she said, "Mr. Smith says he'll see you right away." I walked in and he had a nice looking—the office wasn't very big as I remembered, it was maybe two-thirds of this size. It was a large office.

WHELAN: So, it would be like fifteen by—

LEVINE: You know, something like that.

WHELAN: —thirteen.

LEVINE: Something like that. It wasn't a huge office. It was booked all—books lined up all over. He had bookshelves full of books. He had comfortable chairs. He had a beautiful wooden desk. And I came in, I shook hands with him, and then he said—he turned to the intercom and said, "No calls while I'm with Art Levine. No calls." So then we—he sat down with me and proceeded to talk about my interests, his interests and so forth, books, literature, stories, scion societies, and so forth. And then the secretary walked in and she said, "When you are finished with this interview Mr. Smith, you might want to return the calls from the CEO of General Motors and the Secretary of Commerce." So, obviously (laughs), no calls. Anyway—then at the end of the interview with him—I was there, I would say, a good hour and a half, I think. It was a long one; it was a long time. And he said, "Is there anything you would like to have from my bookshelves?" I said I couldn't think of asking for anything. Then he handed me a couple of publications, he had recent publications. And he said, "Take

this, I wrote this. It's "The Adventure of the Worst Man in London," which was an essay he wrote about Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper. He wrote that in '50--It must have been late, middle fifties. It was published eventually.

WHELAN: Was that in the *Journal*? Published in the *Journal*?

LEVINE: No. It was published in one of the things he published himself. It's called--I have it here. Okay, it was published in *Baker Street and Beyond*, which I think Smith published himself, 1957. And it was it called, in that publication, "The Suppressed Adventure of the Worst Man in London." I have a copy of it--the strip, which he gave me here. Anyway--he gave me that, and it was really fantastic;--I mean--I was floating on air after that was over, and I really couldn't calm down for a while, since it was such a great experience.

WHELAN: How old were you at the time?

LEVINE: It was probably in '54, '53. So I must have been twenty-two or twenty-three.

WHELAN: That would be quite an experience for a Sherlockian.

LEVINE: Right, it was.

WHELAN: When you--when you at look Smith's writing at the time, and he wrote so well, as we all know.

LEVINE: He did.

WHELAN: What were you--what were your feelings when you read--I mean some of his stuff, I thought was lyrical.

LEVINE: It was. It was. He wrote some beautiful poetry, and he wrote some other stories and essays which are terrific. Lyrical is right. He wrote some wonderful stuff. Yeah, he was a very--he was a very good literary person. He had a great feeling for the language and for narrative. He was great.

WHELAN: And he was a business major. He wasn't--he was college educated.

LEVINE: Yes.

WHELAN: Went to NYU, I believe, and--but, he was a business graduate.

LEVINE: Yes he was.

WHELAN: So, where did all of this writing skill come from?

LEVINE: I don't know. I don't know.

WHELAN: Just amazing.

LEVINE: And how he got interested. I have never read a biography of Smith; there should be one.

WHELAN: I believe there should be something. You know—even a compilation of his works.

LEVINE: That's right. Yeah.

WHELAN: Tell me more about that meeting. Is that—have you kind of told me everything that you, you know, want to tell me about that meeting? Because I think that's really interesting. It says so much about—says a lot about you and it says a lot about Smith.

LEVINE: Well. It was a very amiable meeting, and we had a—felt very close during the conversations and he had no airs about him; he was just down to earth, talking about his interests and what he wanted to do with this—with the Baker Street Irregulars and with the Sherlock Holmes movement. We talked a little bit about that.

WHELAN: What did he want to do?

LEVINE: Well. I think what he wanted to do is make it more of a literary society. He was very interested in publication, and he was very interested—he had always encouraged people to write as much as possible for the *Journal* or for other outlets, and that was his love of writing and literature, and I think that's what he wanted it to be. And he invited people, who were non-Sherlockians, to come and speak at the dinners because they were well known literary people. They wanted to encourage that kind of thing. A screenwriter, Edwin—screenwriter at the time. It was in the talk I gave—Edwin Justus Mayer, the screenwriter for *The Buccaneer* and *They Met in Bombay*.

WHELAN: I'll be darned.

LEVINE: He liked those. And he invited some other people I remember. I can't remember who they were, but they were non—they were personalities.

WHELAN: What about the make-up of the organization itself? When Morley was running the organization almost exclusively, it was Morley's friends.

LEVINE: That's right.

WHELAN: His cronies. It was people from the publishing industry.

LEVINE: Right.

*Break in recording.*

LEVINE: Wonderful person. We continued correspondence for a long time until his death, basically. I kept writing him, and he kept writing back to me, encouraging me—for a scion in Cleveland he turned me—no, we started it a couple of years later, and he said, “I’m glad to see you started it and keep on with the good work,” and so forth. He was very great.

WHELAN: Do you have a feeling he was a mentor? That he had those capabilities—taking young people—

LEVINE: He was a mentor for me, and I think he was a mentor for other people. I’m sure he was—Andrew Peck I remember from the early days. I don’t know if it was that early. He came up as a young person and became very active.

WHELAN: Tell me about how the organization reacted to Smith’s death at a very early age. How did people feel? Was there a lot talk about who his successor would be? Can you tell us what you know about that.

LEVINE: Well, of course, I wasn’t in New York at the time. So I think he died in ‘60.

WHELAN: That’s right.

LEVINE: I hadn’t moved to New York until ‘61. So I didn’t have the contact with the people in New York very much at that time. I understand there was an executive committee meeting of the Baker Street Irregulars, consisting of Julian Wolff and several other people who were very active, and they decided that Julian Wolff would continue with the *Journal* or would assume the *Journal*, which he was doing, I think, temporarily and—that he would also become the Buttons-cum-Commissionaire; I think that’s what he was called. So, I think that—there was a discussion, but that wasn’t wide spread among the group.

WHELAN: There was nothing democratic about it.

LEVINE: No. There was nothing democratic. They just met.

WHELAN: They just felt that Julian was the man and obviously was for 26 years.

LEVINE: That’s right. So that’s how it went. As far as I know, everybody went along with it, although, some people may have felt he wasn’t the same as Smith—you know—not the same personality. Not the same—

WHELAN: Certainly more shy and retiring man.

LEVINE: Yeah. He was a little bit but he—when he conducted the meetings, he had all these jokes. He would tell jokes, and he would have all sorts of very clever remarks all the time.

WHELAN: He was a very witty man.

LEVINE: Very witty

WHELAN: Very dry.

LEVINE: Very witty, very dry, very witty. So that made the meetings more–

WHELAN: Were the meetings the same or had–did Julian over time, change them over time, change the tenor of the meetings, or were they pretty much the same as they were?

LEVINE: I think the meetings that–Smith ran very informally. And his meetings–he had to bring them back from chaos every half hour. (Whelan laughs) He was just going all over the place. He was able to do that, he was able to restore order, get it back on track and so forth and so on. As I remember Julian was more cut and dried. In other words, he had an agenda, he followed it, and you didn't have as much cross conversation as much.

WHELAN: Who were some of the wild people at the time?

LEVINE: At the time?

WHELAN: Yeah, I mean–if there was chaos, someone has to create chaos.

LEVEINE. I think Bengis, Nathan Bengis, was a–always talking about it. But, I think, Rosenblum, Morris Rosenblum, and Basil Davenport. I remember them very well. They were always on their feet, talking about something, throwing out some remark, insisting upon something and so forth. They were–I remember them very vividly, both of them.

WHELAN: That's great.

LEVINE: And of course, Davenport and Rosenblum used to say The Musgrave Ritual in Greek or in Latin or both. You know–they were always trying to innovate with a different language. I still do it today.

WHELAN: That's funny because we did it in Yiddish and Italian. (laughs)

LEVINE: I know. They did it in Greek and Latin.

WHELAN: Isn't that wonderful, certainly more erudite than Italian and Yiddish. But nevertheless–

LEVINE: Yes. Those were two of the people that did this and then there was the other Hoffman; what was his name?

WHELAN: Banesh Hoffman?

LEVINE: Banesh Hoffman. Sure. I knew Banesh very well.

WHELAN: He was–wasn't he a mathematician of some note?

LEVINE: Banish was a mathematician of great note, physicist really. And he was a friend of Einstein. He wrote a book about Einstein.

WHELAN: Really!

LEVINE: Yeah, and I had a lot of conversations with him. He lived in Queens. So many times we rode back and forth to the meetings together because I lived fairly close to where he did. And so I knew him pretty well. He was a very interesting person. He was not a leader in terms of the chaos at the dinners, but he was a—very interesting.

WHELAN: He must have been very interesting to you and you to him because of your respective jobs.

LEVINE: That's right.

WHELAN: You at NASA and him in the mathematics, physics field.

LEVINE: That's right. That's right. Yeah. So that was very good. Now, he died very prematurely too. But I would say—then there was Allen Robertson, he was also a character.

WHELAN: An attorney from Baltimore.

LEVINE: Yeah, from Baltimore. I remember him very well. Let's see if I can remember anybody else that was—and then the other one—Richard Hoffman, the psychiatrist. He was also—you know—he spoke a lot. These people were speaking, and they weren't necessary following any agenda; they were just coming up with their ideas and interjecting and so forth, throwing out challenges.

WHELAN: Tell me about your best Irregular friends. People that you really, that you—you know, we have all made friendships in the BSI over the years. Who were some of your best friends that you—are living or dead, that you really enjoyed tremendously and—

LEVINE: Okay. Well, David Weiss was one, because he actually came up about the same time I did. He was invested in 1958; so I was very close. We used to always sit next to each other because of that seniority issue (Whelan laughs) so we were down at the end of table. And we kept in contact a good deal—in between meetings. He lived in Brooklyn, and he started a—it was a Brooklyn Society with Charles—Doctor Charles Goodman. He was also a character who was at the early meetings

WHELAN: Oh yes. Charlie was a character. And, as he got older—

LEVINE: Real character.

WHELAN: And as he got older?

LEVINE: More and more. That's right. That was one. And there was—let's see; I'm trying to remember who were the other people that I got involved with or were close to. I got to think about it a little bit. Maybe I'll come back to it.

WHELAN: Were there any people that you would see outside of the meetings?

LEVINE: Not too much.

WHELAN: You were busy with your career?

LEVINE: I was very busy. Yeah, I was very busy traveling so I didn't see them very much. I remember Hoxie Haas pretty well. I used to see him.

WHELAN: Don't know much about him. Can you talk about him a little bit?

LEVINE: We interacted at the dinners and at the various meetings. He was—

WHELAN: Do you know what his background was?

LEVINE: I think he was a lawyer. I think, and there was another lawyer who was—talked a lot, but I'll have to refresh my memory about some. Those were some people I remember pretty well.

WHELAN: Anyone else that you remember?

LEVINE: I had a lot of contact with Peter Blau. Peter—at the meetings, and then I was in Washington for a couple years at one time. I was at George Washington University on sabbatical, so I saw Peter a lot and he was—

WHELAN: Was he quiet when he was young?

LEVINE: Yeah. He was—he was pretty quiet. Yeah, he was pretty quiet.

WHELAN: At the end of the table, so to speak.

LEVINE: Yeah, he was down at the end of the table, too (laughter). So I got to know him fairly well. Later on, I got to know him better because I saw him a good deal. He was very helpful and very interesting.

WHELAN: In terms of funny moments and times during meetings, can you remember things that just were—split your side on. Can you think of any moments or presentations that people made that really tickled you?

LEVINE: Yeah there were. Well. The funniest moments was when Allen Robertson came dressed as Black Peter with a harpoon stuck in his chest.



WHELAN: Oh my!

LEVINE: And, he brought a—Cavanagh had—the dining room was on the second floor, and he had to walk through the restaurant—and there were back stairs that went up to the dining room. He walked up those stairs, and he had this harpoon stuck in him, it wasn't stuck literally in him, but it was panted, and it was heavy. And he got up to the top of the stairs, and he fell. He fell down the stairs.

WHELAN: This is for real?

LEVINE: For real. Yeah. We heard it clatter.

WHELAN: Oh God!

LEVINE: We heard it clatter, Robertson falling down the stairs. We all rushed to the top of the stairs, and there he was at the bottom of the stairs with the harpoon stuck in his chest. (laughter).

WHELAN: Oh, God! Oh that's hilarious.

LEVINE: Yeah, it could have been a scene right from the story. So, that was very—that was funny. Fortunately, he was not hurt. Wolff came down to him—Julian Wolff came down—he had whisky—he gave him brandy. And—but he wasn't hurt—but he never came to a meeting again with a harpoon.

WHELAN: How about the least funny moments of the things—you know—thought might have been off key? Or just, discordant in terms of the—

LEVINE: There was an argument, a very heated argument between the psychiatrist, who was named Richard Hoffman and a lawyer. Now, I'm trying to remember who the lawyer was. They had some dispute about the psychiatric profession and whether it was legitimate and so forth, and they had a shouting match at the table, which wasn't good. That was—that was not good. I might be able to recall the name of the lawyer.

WHELAN: Was that when Smith was in charge?

LEVINE: Yes.

WHELAN: Or Julian?

LEVINE: Smith was there.

WHELAN: Did he calm it down?

LEVINE: He calmed it down –yeah–he calmed it down. Those were the early days. I don't remember anything like that since. You know–an awkward moment or something like that at the dinner. But that was the worst thing I remember. Yeah.

WHELAN: That's interesting because it's the type of thing that you obviously haven't forgotten fifty years later.

LEVINE: No I hadn't forgot that–I didn't forget that. It was very disturbing. But, otherwise, things were pretty–things were a little chaotic, but they were affable. I remember the funniest thing was Herb Brean. It reminded me of the skit they did today. Herb Brean was an editor of *Time Magazine*. He was a very good journalist, and he was a very low-key guy, but he did a skit. And the skit was–he was on the telephone, and it was Watson trying to get a story into a magazine, one of his stories, and he was on the phone. He was the editor, and he was talking with Watson. And they were talking, and he would say things like, “That story is not realistic enough” or, “No one could deduce that,” or something like that (laughter). And it went on for about twenty minutes, and it was so funny because as an editor himself, he knew what kind of things to–you know–pitfalls in the stories. So it was picking apart the Watson stories and saying, “No they're not good enough.”

WHELAN: Wonderful.

LEVINE: It was a wonderful, wonderful skit. I remember it to this day.

WHELAN: Did you attend any other regular events like Silver Blaze races, Saturday cocktail parties, Julian Wolff's gatherings, theater outings? If you could talk about any of the memories that you might have.

LEVINE: I went to a lot of Silver Blazes. And they were at Belmont and Aqueduct at that time, and I used to go every year, basically, and they were very good. They were really interesting. Rex Stout–I remember sitting next to Rex Stout and his wife at one of them, which was very nice. Because we talked and they gambled–they were telling me which horse might be a good horse in terms of Stout's outlook on the stories and so forth. That was very nice–yeah that was nice–we had the bus ride from the Players Club back and forth–was a good–very good way of talking to people and learning about them and so forth. The Silver Blaze was always a lot of fun.

WHELAN: Julian's receptions early on were for out of town people so I don't know if you ever–

LEVINE: I don't think I went to Julian's. I never went to his receptions–his receptions, where were they?

WHELAN: They were in his house, I mean not house, but his apartment.

LEVINE: His apartment–I was in his apartment.

WHELAN: Right, but he did have them, but when he did them, it was all out—I think he just did it as a kind of reception for people who came from out of town.

LEVINE: No I didn't. I did—I was in his apartment once, but I don't remember why. And maybe it was in connection with the *Journal* or something like that. He typed the entire *Journal* himself. He sat down at his typewriter and—you could see some of the old ones, you can see it was typed. He did all the typing. It was amazing, and I saw him editing and typing and so forth when I was up at his apartment on Riverside Drive. I remember that very well.

WHELAN: Can you share with us some Irregular story or stories important to you? You know—anything that you have ever heard or—obviously Isaac Asimov was a bit of a character.

LEVINE: Yes he was.

WHELAN: He came a little later in Julian's time but—

LEVINE: Yes, he did.

WHELAN: —but larger than life person.

LEVINE: He was larger than life, and he would —what I remember about him, because I sat next to him—we were at the same table with him a couple of times. He would compose a Sherlockian limerick, at the table.

WHELAN: Really!

LEVINE: He would write down the limerick just out of his head, and then he would stand up, and he would recite it. And it was terrific because he had such a great imagination. He was very good in that way.

WHELAN: IQ of 200 or something like that.

LEVINE: Yeah, or something like that. He was great. He was very interesting. He was interesting to talk to.

WHELAN: Have you written any Sherlockian essays or pastiches or—

LEVINE: Yeah, I had —well I had three articles in the *Journal*, and they were very early in the sixties—I think they were all in the sixties, maybe early seventies. One was “A Man of “Formidable Resourcefulness” and talked about Sherlock Holmes role in exposing the Zimmerman note, which was during World War I, and then the other one dealt with—this was under a pseudonym, -Alicia Cutter, which is my investiture, instead of the Cutter Alicia, Alicia Cutter, which was called “Sherlock Holmes in Space”. And the third one was called, “Lowenstein's Other Creeper” and it attempted to prove that the abominable snowman was really the creeping man.

WHELAN: That's pretty original.

LEVINE: So, those three articles appeared in the *Journal*.

WHELAN: Was it important in those days to get articles in the *Journal*, I mean was it—

LEVINE: Yes.

WHELAN: —some kind of status symbol?

LEVINE: It was. It was.

WHELAN: Yeah. I think it still is to some degree.

LEVINE: It still is, definitely still is and it helped me to get in into the—although I think I got in before the first one was published, but I had sent Smith some of the stuff that I had written. So I was very active at the time.

WHELAN: So you had the right bona fides, you know for him?

LEVINE: Yeah. I think so—scion societies started and so forth. So he was—

WHELAN: Are there any other Sherlockian activities or experiences that you had that you would like to share with us?

LEVINE: Yes, traveling and meeting Sherlockians in different parts of the world. That we've done, whenever we could. We met Sherlock Holmes people in Japan, and that was a very interesting experience.

WHELAN: Who were some of the individuals that you met?

LEVINE: Well, Let's see. I have to remember the names.

WHELAN: One is a psychiatrist, who was the —he's kind of the emeritus head of the Japan Sherlock Holmes Club now, but I can't remember his name.

LEVINE: His name—one was Kiyoshi Tanaka.

WHELAN: Okay. That's the artist. Tanaka was the guy who that did all those line drawings of all the buildings.

LEVINE: I think that one was one of them we met—the other was the one who lived in Osaka, and I'm trying to remember his name. But, anyway, I can supplement this with his name if you need. He was very nice. He came in from Osaka, to Tokyo, and he took us out, and we had a wonderful experience with him because in the evening he took us up to an office

building in Shinjuku; it's the Times Square. It's called Shinjuku section of Tokyo with all these lights. It's like a Times Square, only a hundred times more.

WHELAN: Right.

LEVINE: And he took us up. He said, "Let's come with me." We went up to about the fourteenth floor of an office building, and we go in, and there is a Victorian restaurant complete with all the Victorian fittings, recessed windows with Sherlockian scenes in the windows, a perfect replica of a London pub of the era.

WHELAN: Wonderful.

LEVINE: And this was in Tokyo, and I never expected it. So he took us there.

WHELAN: Very thoughtful.

LEVINE: Very thoughtful. It was very nice. He was great and we enjoyed—

WHELAN: Any other places in the world.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well in Sweden, we went to the Sherlock Holmes Society, the head of that. His name was Anders. Anders?

WHELAN: Hammarqvist?

LEVINE: No. His name was Anders Wiggström, and he lives right outside of the capital of Sweden, but it's a small town where he lives. They publish a journal called *The Moor*, which I get. I joined it. It's in Swedish, but they have an English summary every issue. And that was very nice, and we spent the day with him. Went to—had a meeting with some other Sherlockians. That was very nice. In Norway—now his name has slipped my mind.

WHELAN: Nils Nordberg?

LEVINE: Yes.

WHELAN: He's in radio I think.

LEVINE: He's in radio. He's a radio commentator. He was very nice. He met us and took us over to the famous hotel in Oslo where Grieg would come and some other people, who were literary or lucid people would come, and tell us all about the Sherlockian activity. He's been here a couple of times. He's been to the dinners hasn't he?—I think—I think he told me. I met him once a couple or few years ago.

WHELAN: He has been. He has been. In fact, he gave a paper a couple of times.

LEVINE: Right. Right.

WHELAN: One of his papers is in this new volume *The Scandinavia Sherlock Holmes*. So we've got Danish pieces, one of his pieces, Norwegian, and a lot of Swedish pieces, classic and current. Did you ever get to England and meet those folks?

LEVINE: Yes, I did. I didn't—never got to a Sherlock Holmes Society meeting, Society of London meeting, but I did go to the statue—the festival—statue festival, and there we met a lot of Sherlockians from there. And we participated in the events, which was very—was great.

WHELAN: Did you go out to the sculptures?

LEVINE: Yes.

WHELAN: We were there too.

LEVINE: That was very nice.

WHELAN: That was wonderful.

LEVINE: That was wonderful. So that was good. We'd met the lady who runs—leads the Marylebone Library.

WHELAN: Catherine Cooke.

LEVINE: Catherine. Yes. Met her out there. And we met her here. She was here a couple of times.

WHELAN: She's faithful. I mean, I can't imagine since Catherine starting coming to the dinners, I don't think she's ever missed a dinner. Lovely lady.

LEVINE: And the other experience we had just recently was in India where, unfortunately, we missed seeing a Sherlockian there. But, through travel—we were on a tour—we couldn't get together. Finally we were supposed to get—meet in Delhi, and our travel arrangements got misarranged, so we had to leave before we could see him. But, since then, we'd done plenty of correspondence—a lengthy correspondence with him. He sent me stuff. He wrote, I wrote so forth. So, I had a—very nice time with him. I couldn't remember any of the names, escapes me. I can't remember any of the names. But any way, it could be supplemented.

WHELAN: As we wrap this up. Can you kind a of summarize for us and for future scholars, and Irregulars in the future, what this long association with the Baker Street Irregulars and Sherlock Holmes has met to you over these years.

LEVINE: Well let me just—one other incident is very important. We went to Santa Fe, and we met John Bennett Shaw, and we went to his house and we saw his collection. And that was an overwhelming experience. I've also seen Peter Blau's collection too, but Bennett Shaw's was (Whelan laughs) out of this world. Anyway, he was very nice. He spent a whole day

with us, showed us around his collection. His wife was there, and it was a great highlight to get to know him and to get to see his fabulous collection. It was wonderful. As far as what it's meant to me. It's a source of great joy, wonderful experiences, meeting marvelous people, all over the world basically—having an interest that I would never think I would have originally, when I was very young because the stories and the literature and so forth, leads you in all sorts of paths. You never get bored. There is always something new and something different, and something intellectually stimulating about it. And then you have a wonderful time, meetings and everything else. It was Great. And we went to Italy also; we had a marvelous experience in Italy, in Florence, because there we met our friend—

WHELAN: Enrico Solito?

LEVINE: Enrico Solito, yes.

WHELAN: Gianluca Salvatore?

LEVINE: We didn't meet him. We didn't meet him but we met Enrico.

WHELAN: Lovely man.

LEVINE: Enrico, he was nice enough to come and meet us, although he lived outside of Florence.

WHELAN: In Sesto, I think.

LEVINE: He was nice enough to come, and meet us in the afternoon and take us around—gave us a Sherlockian tour of Florence. Because, in the hiatus, he was supposed to have come there, and he showed the chocolate shop that Sherlock Holmes would have visited, the costume shop he would have visited. He showed us all the places, which we know that Holmes in Florence would not have missed. So he showed us all these places, and he wrote an article, which was wonderful, about which train Holmes took to get to Florence. He went back and did the research on all the train schedules from—was it 1891? He went deep—so he figured out, he deduced, what train he must have taken to arrive in Florence at that particular time.

WHELAN: Amazing what the Sherlockians (laughter)—what limits they will go to prove a point.

LEVINE: I know. So that was good. So in-all-and-all, it has been fantastic, a fabulous experience. It's a great thing that I enjoy very, very much. This—the opportunity to go back and look at it has been also been excellent for me. Because I went back and looked at many of the journals and the minutes of the meetings, minutes of various scion societies and so forth so I could recall all this stuff. It was wonderful. So all in all it's a wonderful thing..

WHELAN: Art, you are one of the BSI's treasures, and I mean that most sincerely.

LEVINE: Thank you.

WHELAN: I think that we never really appreciate what we have until people are gone, and I think, in your particular instance, you're still with us (laughter), and we are very happy you are. Thanks again.

LEVINE: You are welcome.

*end of interview*