One Ashland, Many Voices Oral History Project
Transcript of Interview with Glenn Patterson Crone

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PZ: Can you please state your name and your birth date?

GC: I am Glenn Patterson Crone and I was born on May 17, 1928.

PZ: Where were you born?

GC: I was born outside of Buffalo, NY, a little bitty place – Lancaster and my father worked for the government so we travelled extensively. As a matter of fact, I think it was 24 different cities we lived in before I went to high school.

PZ: When did you come to Ashland?

GC: I had been working overseas through most of the fifties. I lived in Japan after the war – that was two years, and I liked foreign service so I went to work for an oil company – “Standard Vacuum Petroleum” and worked primarily in Semantra, Hong Kong, Singapore and I did one assignment in London. I was basically a troubleshooter in government public and labor relations in south-east Asia. I have some skills in terms of solving problems and that was how I was utilized. But I was injured in Semantra, I and embankment during a cloudburst and six months later, on a Sunday morning, I couldn’t walk. So, I was hospitalized in total of 18 months
– 6 months traction, 6 months walking body cast, 3 additional months in traction, 3 additional months in a walking body cast and then they operated on me exploratory and they were able to correct it. For the most part, I have no problems but under the circumstances I didn’t dare go back overseas because if something went wrong I wanted to be near a good hospital. So, I came back to the States. It was kind of burned out in the business world, so I decided I wanted to be an actor and several things brought me to the Richmond area. Number one is -- I am a graduate of Cornell – and business, of a type, is my background. Richmond is unique and it is kind of isolated from financial problems. The lows are not as low and the highest are not as high. It is mainly because of diversification and it is a good place to come. Second thing was that I knew I wanted to get into performing. When I was in the hospital in Singapore, there was a young lady that I was dating then, who brought me several newspapers from the United States and there was a picture. I will never forget it -- of two girls and the caption was two thespians working on an old tavern near Richmond, Virginia, that is going to become a theatre. I thought, “Godly day, that sounds exciting.” Long since lost that, it was, I remember it clearly, it was Sepia - the brownish print you used to see in the Sunday newspapers. Anyway, that was the second thing. And then, when I walked it over with my brother, he said “that’s a great idea because I’ve got a church down there.” He is a graduate of Cornell and the Westminster choir in Princeton and so he accepted the job down here and I came back and settled in Richmond. Then, after my wife and I were married, there was a rape in our neighborhood and we had three little girls – my children and my stepchildren. We did not like the idea of the possibility of them being bothered so we chose Ashland and moved out here.

PZ: Why did you choose Ashland?

GC: Why? It is a small town and historic. In driving around, for weeks, we would go out on a Sunday with all the kids in the car and they hated it. We would drive around and of all the different neighborhoods, the ones that were set up around the railroad were the ones that we kind of liked. Bon Airier on the south side initially was a railroad set up and this one definitely was with the train coming right through the center of the town. It was very intriguing, we liked the buildings – they were quite beautiful. And then, I liked the idea of being near a university because it is kind of neat to be able to get into a good library every now and then.

PZ: So, you came here with your wife and your three kids?

GC: Five children – three girls, two boys.

PZ: What made Ashland so special for you?

GC: The house that we found was exactly what we wanted.

PZ: If I can ask you a little bit about your family background.

GC: Sure

PZ: What were your parents and grandparents like?
GC: I am Irish descent on both sides. The name Crone was probably originally spelled “Crohn.” Then, when the Vikings started moving which was in the beginning of the many ice age in 793 was the invasion of (Lindys) Farm and then they moved into and settled in Ireland. The one side was the Crohns and the other side was the Pattersons. The Pattersons came from an area Bali Pit mar, which is not too terribly far from Terra in northeastern Ireland. Terra historically is the legendary sea of King O’Neal. He is the one that forced the Irish out. They went over to Scotland, which was sparsely populated and then when they came back they were known as the Scotch-Irish. My mother’s family would be considered Shady-Irish because they were indigenous – they stayed in Ireland. My father’s family – the Crohns would have been classified as Scotch-Irish because the clan was pushed over into Scotland and then came back. I do not know any of the people on my father’s side. I know about the estate in Scotland that is still there but I have no connection with them. As far as my mother’s family – my grandfather was the youngest of seven children of a couple that had moved to the States. He was 57 when they came over – that would be my grandfather’s father and his wife was 58 – a year older. So, my grandfather was the youngest son – nice guy. He ran a dairy farm in Buffalo and he loved horses – of course that is traditional in Ireland, almost. Purtruns were the ones he really liked – a great, big, draft animals. When I was little, he would pick me up and stand me on top of these horses. Of course, they were so flat and big that I could actually walk around on them. It was fun! He had a bit of an Irish accent and my uncles used to tease him because he would be in the barn, talking to the cows and the horses, and they’d say “Who are you talking to?” and he’d say “A damned intelligent men!” He was a funny guy – a really nice man.

PZ: What were the traditions on your family and did you preserve any of them?

GC: Not really, with the exception of Christmas. Christmas has always been crucially important in my family. Quite honestly, most of the things that we do in our family – the five children and my wife – are based on my wife’s family. Without going into any detail, it was kind of a strange situation how my wife and I got together. She had some difficulties that had to be taken care of in terms of child abduction. So, a lot of how things might have been were flavored by that and what I tended to do, not in a bad way, but I kind of supplemented what would have been important to me because of the situation that she was facing and we were facing together. Marriage is an incredible thing, I tell you. The concept of “we” is something we do not give enough thought to. It is “me,” “you” when it really should be “we.”

PZ: You mentioned that religion is very important to you. What is the religion in your family?

GC: My mother, surprisingly enough, even though they stayed in Ireland, they were Protestants, which is quite unusual. I have no idea why they became Protestants because traditionally most Irish that stayed in Ireland were not Protestants. The clan that went over to Scotland and then came back, the clan itself was the Fergussons and Crohn was one of the offshoots. Traditionally, they would have been Presbyterian and probably were – I do not know definitively. My feeling at it has always been pretty simplistic. As I mentioned to you before, I was born a Baptist, brought up a Methodist, recruited to the Episcopal Church so I could sing in the boys’ choir. I liked the ritual, took instruction, it did not take but then when I married a Catholic girl – I mean, with 5 children – Lord, Yes! I guess we were all going the same place.
examining Catholicism, there was no problem with me. I could become a Catholic without offending any of the things that I believe.

PZ: So, did you go to church, as a family?

GC: O, good Lord, yes!

PZ: Was it a tradition for you every Sunday?

GC: Yes, always every Sunday. Now, Sib and I go to St. Anne’s up here. They have a marvelous, marvelous priest, Father Chris Heidegger. We have known him 30 years and the kids used to call him “Hey dinger.” Wonderful man! At any rate, we go regularly on Sunday and we go to morning mess normally on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

PZ: So, let us get back to Ashland. How old were you when you came here?

GC: One of the reasons why Ashland was important to us – I was working over at Barksdale and it was a lot closer to drive from here over to Barksdale than it was from the west end over here.

PZ: What was like to work as an actor?

GC: It is tremendous fun, tremendous fun, I love it! When I was really little, my family went through the crash. I was very little but I remember the crash. As a matter of fact, one of the things that really stuck out in my mind is that my dad came home and I was there – just a little bitty. They talked to me a lot, read to me a lot, so I was aware. And, my dad told my mother that they were going to cut his salary. I had no idea what salary was – I thought he meant sullery – the vegetable. I could not understand why my mother was crying because they were going to cut a vegetable. It just did not make any sense. Anyway, you asked me a question and I forgot what it was.

PZ: The question was how old you were when you came to Ashland.

GC: I do not remember. I really do not remember.

PZ: Were you here during the civil right movements?

GC: I do know when I came to Richmond. I moved here December 23 1960. Then I opened my first show over at Barksdale on July 7 1961 and it was John Brown’s Body – excellent play. Since then, I have done roughly 150 professional productions but up until last year, I had done 87 plays at Barksdale. It was kind of interesting. I had played in “Barefoot in the Park” and I played Viktor Velasko – 48 years old and a thrilly nice fellow. I have played him twice. They were producing him last year and one of the walk-ons got sick and could not appear. So, they called me up and asked me, because I was familiar with the play, would I do the walk-on. And I said yes, I’d be glad to. And I did and I thrilly enjoyed it. There were two performances and therefore, I can classify it as a credit. What is significant about it was that I had done 87 shows prior to this. This would be the 88th credit there. Back in my service days, communication was not what it is today and we used to have an inside numeric code where we could communicate
expressions, feelings and things like that without everybody knowing what it meant. 88 means “signed with love.” I thought that was kind of neat. When I told my wife about it, I told her also that I was looking for a postscript.

PZ: When you came to Ashland, did you have any other jobs, or you were just acting?

GC: Initially, I went to work for an organization called “The Virginia Council on Health and Medical Care.” They are defunct now, unfortunately. That was headed up by a gentleman called Edgar J. Fisher. There were a lot of places in greater Virginia that really did not have adequate facilities in terms of medical care. The Virginia council was doing their best to recruit young doctors – some foreign, some fresh out of med school – and help them get established from these different communities around Virginia. I went to work for them and I was primarily a fundraiser. I travelled down to the western part of Virginia and I would talk to business leaders explaining what we were doing. I have a gift of gab and it is easy to talk, easy to communicate so I raised a fair amount of money for them.

PZ: You mentioned this big house. Where was it? Does it still exist?

GC: It is still there. It is on College Avenue. We looked at it in 1974. That is when our kids – I mentioned that they were abducted – they were still out of the country. We looked at it then and it was priced at 29 thousand dollars – I will never forget this. We liked it but under the circumstances – since we did not know where the children were and we knew they knew where we were, we did not want to move because suppose they try to call or something like that. Probably a groundless fear, but it was there. So, we did not do anything about it. Then, we got the kids back. I think it was 1974 – it was two and a half years that they were gone. We came back up to Ashland and looked at the house and now it was priced 49 thousand dollars – twenty thousand more. We went ahead and bought it – that would have been 1978. We lived there for 8 years, got the kids through school, and then we decided that we wanted to open up bread and breakfast. I had a little health problem and that would be something that I could do without restraining myself physically. My wife would continue in real estate because we were in real estate by that time. We sold the house probably in 1988 and I believe we got 85 thousand for it. We relisted it after the man did some work at it and as I remember we sold it for 135 thousand in less than a year. Then, just recently, I had the occasion to talk to some people that know about what has happened. An addition was put on it and it is huge, and it is 401 College Avenue and it is worth well over 300 thousand dollars. It is amazing how the prices have gone up. Just amazing.

PZ: How was the neighborhood back then?

GC: Very nice, very nice. The president of Randolph-Macon was only a block away and his kids and my kids played together. That is one of the neat things about Ashland. If you look at the statistics, you see that crime is fairly high. But the truth of the matter is that we get credited for crime that occurs on the 95-corridor. Actually, what happens in the town – almost no crime what so ever. Of course, now with the drug situation more of that is crapping up.

PZ: What were the gathering places?
GC: Other than church and our relationship with the theatre – see, when you are in theatre – that is a full time commitment. Frequently, it would be six nights a week where you have to be over there at five o’clock. I would wait tables – that was part of the attraction. People could know you as an actor but they were not placed in a difficult situation. They met you before you went on stage so they did not feel obligated to, if they did not like your performance they were not embarrassed by not being able to say anything. They meet you before and they are not put in a disturbing situation if they do not like what you did. And we made pretty decent money of it. The all considered, we did not make very much acting because they could not afford to pay us very much.

PZ: Do you have any “Ashland stories?”

GC: Let me see. Yes, here is one. I have dealt with real estate off and on – I actually wrote my first contract in 1946. But I was not dealing in it then. I did not start that until much, much later when we moved up here to Ashland. I had a license before but I did not do much with it – that was in the early sixties. When my wife decided to get into real estate, she listed a neat little property over the railroad track. I have forgotten the name of the man who was there – a wonderful, little, older man. I believe he was a graduate of Cornell because I met him when we had gatherings over there of Cornell alumnae. Because of my knowing them, my wife met them on a Cornell gathering. When he died, ultimately, the lady wanted to sell it so she listed it with Cybil, my wife. It was Cybil’s first listing. We advertised it and did everything we were supposed to do and a man called us. I am not going to mention his name because it is kind of embarrassing for him now. He told my wife that he wanted this couple to come up and take a look at it and he said “soft pedal” – the railroad. In other words, do not talk about it, maybe they will not notice. What he failed to realize is that to the Ashlander, that is high rent district. Everybody wants to be on the railroad track. I cannot blame them either, it is beautiful. Anyway, she sold it. Those people became very, very dear friends. Now, that building belongs to the college. It is the one right next to the tennis courts.

PZ: Is it a little white house?

GC: It is a little white house and there is a stream that runs right next to it and across the stream is the tennis courts. It is a nice, little house.

PZ: How did you feel about the college being in town? I know that there are a lot of people that did not approve of it.

GC: O, Lord, no! At least not to my knowledge. Let me put it this way. I like conversations. I like to talk to people that are intelligent and I like to not necessary argue but share ideas and stuff like that. Actually, I am very peaceful. I am not interested in the ordinary stuff. I mean – who is married to who, who is cheating on who, who drank too much – that stuff does not turn me on. Having a group of people like this, the college, is really neat. We went to a marriage in Richmond. I believe it is one of the professors over there – John Lynch. We went just the other night and there is another one coming up next week. That was the sort of thing where we
probably had forty couples from St. Anne’s sitting around and talk. It is the sort of thing I like very much. You do not get that unless you have a learning institution nearby.

PZ: Why do you think Ashland does not expand? Why do you think it is still this small town?

GC: In truth, it is expanding. Of course, that is like so many other things. A lot of the people do not want to have Ashland changed and that is all well and good if that is the way you feel. But times are changing. For example, when I was in Japan, I did not talk to my parents for two years. It was impossible; there was no way I could. Today, if I were in Iraq I could be on the phone every day and talk to them. We are becoming a global society; things are changing. Even though you might want to not let it happen, it is going to happen, and it is happening -- you just do not necessary recognize it. Take language for example – French. French used to be the language you had to know for international travel. That is no longer true and the reason for it is the purists have stunted its growth because they want to keep it the way it was. So, now they do not have the words. For example, the English language - the last authoritative dictionary that came out was 470 thousand words. You can explain anything in English. It is amazing.

PZ: How about the race issues in Ashland?

GC: I do not know that there is any. There may be but frankly, I am not aware of it. When I was in elementary school, junior high school, and even into high school, I lived in areas where there were very few black people. The ones that I remember best were the outstanding ones. Ithaca is where I ended up going to high school, for example. There were two black families and let us see if I can remember the names. The guy that I was in school was a very slender black man. The family name was one of the royalties of the kingdom of what is now Libya. I had forgotten his name. Wonderful guy – very intelligent, just extremely intelligent and fun to know. There was another black family and these were big fellows and handsome devils. Whereas the one family excelled academically, these people were the athletes – caption of the football team, captain of the tennis. Wonderful guys. The sports type was always president of the class. There was nothing problematic about that when I was coming up. So, I am not aware. It may be here but I am not aware of it.

PZ: What about the politics in Ashland? I know there was a big problem when Wal-Mart was building?

GC: Then again, it is like I mentioned about French. A lot of people will argue with me and that is fine. I mentioned that business is my background. They do a superb job. They charge low prices, comparatively speaking, and they pay reasonable wages. The way a business is sustainable – you are taking a certain amount of money, and you cover your expenses, and you make a reasonable profit. Wal-mart is ideal. If we did not have a Wal-mart, we would be paying higher prices. There is a basic flow and that is you cannot expect to take more out of a situation than you put into it. It will not work. That is why currently we are just drowned in indebtedness – the country. And quite honestly, we are destroying ourselves as a result. Talk about the decline and fall of the Roman Empire -- we are on our way down. Do you ever tune
into YouTube? There was a really good thing. Believe me, I am a dinosaur, I am not very good on this stuff. YouTube had a wonderful thing on, entitled “Did You Know.” Here is just one statistic out of this. It is mind-binding information. China has more children through the high school age that are, what we would consider, exceptional intelligence, honorable material, way, way up there. They have more of those than we have children in the United States at all levels. China and India and Brazil are three major countries that are really on the growth. Honestly, we are so insular; we do not even realize that we are not holding our own. We spend ten times as much money to pull kids up as we do on helping the ones that are way up there excel. I have no problem with helping kids up but I think it should be at least fifty-fifty. Why penalize a guy because he has got intelligence? Sure, help the one that is not as fast, no question. But do not penalize the one that really can do something. All you have got to do is walk around and look at the professionals. The influx of doctors from India is incredible. The reason is we are not training them here. The talent is there; it is just that we are not doing very good job with it. Brings tears to me, ladies.

PZ: So, back to Ashland. What about the places like the Iron Horse and Ashland Coffee and Tea? Do they contribute to the community here?

GC: O, Lord, yes! I am particularly interested in how the Iron Horse did what they did. Years ago, when I first was exposed to this area, any place that sold alcohol – we went through real throes there; initially, it was brown bagging, and then you could buy beer. It was ABC on and ABC off and all these sorts of stuff – a lot of ridiculous regulations. Ridiculous from my point of view. At any rate, then when liquor by the drink came in, any place that could sell attracted people who, frankly, spent more than enough time in the bar. That turned off people who liked to go in and get a sociable drink. The way the Iron Horse did it – they opened up mainly as a restaurant that served alcohol. They did not open up as a bar serving alcohol and you can buy something to eat. In other words, the emphasis was different. As a result, they ended up not attracting – I do not mean to be disrespectful – people who spend too much time in the bar. It did not attract them. They attracted people who wanted to have a sociable drink and have something to eat. Quite honestly, part of that was that they deliberately priced a little higher because a guy who is going to drink fourteen beers is going to look for the one that is cheapest. For somebody who is going to ask for a cocktail – what is a few cents?

PZ: How about the carnivals here – I was here during the Christmas carnival and then some others?

GC: Those are neat. I like the strawberry festival. That is wonderful. Quite honestly, I am not as involved in it as I used to be. One year, I forgot when this was, but they hired me to be a strawberry. This is no kidding. Do you know the bending metal that is used to bind bales of cotton and bales of paper together? It is roughly a half-inch wide – it is about the size of this kind of tape, maybe a little narrower. So, what I did is I got some of it and I created a strawberry shaped thing that I could hang around my neck. The top of the strawberry would be my shoulders and then it would come down. It was kind of tight around but loose. A friend of mine who built costumes for Barksdale created a strawberry cloth. I had a green thing that I
put on my head. Then, I went over and walked around as a strawberry. I only did it one year – it was terribly hot. It was kind of fun.

PZ: You said that you have been Santa for?

GC: 47 years. When I was working over at Barksdale – this is how I got started. A friend of mine was managing a place called a (40.10) Mall which was on the north side of Richmond. We had a semi professional football team in the area. I have forgotten the name of it. At any rate, she had hired the linebacker to play Santa. The history of why we had Santas at malls is fascinating. At any rate, she had hired this linebacker. The first day at his first fifteen-minute break, he got up, went to take his break, and never came back. We joked about it that he could not face that line. She called me up, desperate. Would I please come down and play Santa. I said I did not want to, like I mentioned to you earlier. I did not want to be in a position of lying to a child. And if he said “are you Santa?” at that point I did not feel comfortable saying yes. At any rate, I did it on the condition that she would find somebody to replace me. And of course, she told me she tried, but I know that she did not because little kids like me and I like little kids. So, I was battling how on Earth do I avoid this question. Then, Bill Thalhimer Senior from Thalhimer’s stores – now closed, unfortunately. He was a very, very nice gentleman. He saw me work with children and he asked me if I would come down and work for him. I told him I really did not want to for this reason and he worked on me, and he won. So, it ended up that I wrote a little book, entitled “The release of Santa Clause” and it defines Santa as anybody who gives or does simply because they love and, secondarily, hides their identity by using the name Saint Nicolas or Santa Clause so that they cannot be repaid. In effect, there are many. That way, with that little book, when the little kids said “Are you Santa?” I could say yes, and be perfectly truthful. So, I ended up working for them for, Gosh, seems like forever. Then, when Thalhimer’s closed, I merged with Melarn Roads. The Santas, the two Santas merged. I stuck with them for a few years but their method of operation was a little bit different than what I like. My objective in playing Santa was to teach a child to be selfless because I think that is the answer to the world’s problems. The motivation, quite honestly, as I saw it on the part on the Melarn Roads operation and what is followed as a result, the offspring of the Melarn Roads operation was more concerned, in my opinion, in selling pictures. That bothered me, so I stopped. Now, I have a number of places that I go, the Country Club of Virginia - I will be there five times next December. It has gotten to the point now where in January I will be getting calls to fill in my December schedule. I am serious. Because they like how I do it and they want to make sure I am going to be there. And I love it. It is hard work, but I tell you, kids are wonderful, just wonderful.

PZ: What do they ask you?

GC: O, Lord! Incredible questions, all kinds of things. I have devised several different ways of dealing with it. For example, here is one. This is a recollection that is kind of neat. The Virginia Press Association asked me to appear, nobody knew that I was going to be there, at an annual dinner. So, I walk in, in costume. “Oo, Santa!” It is wonderful. The owner of the restaurant knew because the person who had arranged it had told him. So, he had brought his little boy in. The little boy is sitting at the bar and everyone else is back in the dining room. The little kid
was as cute as it can be, a little boy. He was not going to be fooled. So, he said “You do not know who I am, Santa,” and I said “O yes, I do.” He said “All right, tell me my name,” and I said “No way on Earth! You doubt me, I am not going to cooperate with you! No way! I will tell you one thing, though, I not only know your name, I know how to spell it. I bet you do not!” He said “I do, too,” and I said, “Prove it!” He said “B-O-B-Y.” So, I did not use his name right away. We chatted for a little bit and then, finally, I said “Well, see you later, Bob..Oo, I was not going to tell you your name!” He said “How did you know my name?” Little kids are funny; I mean you can do all sorts of things with them. And, believe me, I do not do it to fool them, that is not the point. What I want to do is I want to get them to like me so much that they really listen to me when I am telling the important things. One other thing; this is just a technique I use occasionally. Kids think I know everything, and I do not know everything but I know how to learn very rapidly. For example, there is a line and one of the little kids will start pushing. The mother will say, “John, for goodness sake, stop pushing your sister!” I will look up, so I am not looking directly at anybody and I will say, “John, I will be right with you.” The little head will go up so now I know the name and I know who it belongs to. I can memorize ten or fifteen of these little kids when it occurs. Then, when they come up – it is there. Sometimes, what I do is, I will play one against the other. Like, let us say that the two of you come in to see me. I will look at you and I will say, “Has she been good?” Then, you will use her name. Say, “o, yes! Plamena is very nice.” Then, I will say, “Well, Plamena, that is nice. How about her – was she good?” It is kind of neat, playing these little names with them. One of the things that I do is I try very, very hard never to lie to them. For example, here is one that I never get to say the whole thing. But a little kid will say, “Do you mean to tell me that you visit every house on Christmas Eve?” I will say, “That really upsets me. Everybody thinks that visit all of the houses in 24 hours. That is absolutely not true! Actually, it is 48 hours that is Christmas. The instant it starts is only one second, but it is the day, ok?” And then what I do, I will not go into the actual numbers but I quote the circumference of the Earth, how long it takes to go. Therefore, you are travelling at 17.9 miles per minute and if you travel at half that speed as you are going around, it is moving, and moving, and moving, and you end up at the last second, which is 24 hours after the first second. It is actually a 48 hour period that is December 25 somewhere on the world. But the point is – I said it is not true. And then, I explain how it could be if it were true. The little kids will go with the illusion that it is true but I have not lied to them. Another thing too that is kind of interesting. Some little kid, particularly in an area like this where there is deer hunting, they will say “how come your deer are all male?” I would say “O, no, they are not.” “But they all have antlers!” There is only one deer where both the female and the male have antlers. They are called curbu in North America but in Siberia, where they originated from, they are called Siberian deer. The thing is that they are the only ones where both the female and the male have antlers. This is the intriguing part about it. The male drops its antlers normally around the 1st November and he would not have antlers during December. The female does not drop her antlers; of course, they grow them fresh every year. But she does not drop hers until the spring. Knowledgeable kids, if they know, they will say, “well, how come they all get antlers?” And I say, “Look, they drop their antlers as of November but we are so busy during November and December that all of our photo ops are earlier in the year.” So, what I am doing is I am taking information and using it to create an illusion that is attractive.
do it in a way that I am not lying. But I am not destroying the illusion, I am creating it. It is kind of fun.

PZ: It must be. And what are your Christmas traditions? How do you celebrate Christmas? You and Ashland also?

GC: I am so tied up going up different places playing Santa that with the exception of what we do at home, I am not involved in anything like that. One of that things that is very traditional, Santa drives around in a fire truck and for years they always make a point of coming by and seeing me, which is kind of neat. It really is. O, this is terrible. But it is kind of amusing. As you know, I have written three books and I am working on another one right now. There was an article in the newspaper. A gal had written a book called “The Chamber Made.” She had come to Virginia for a signing. One morning, I read the paper every morning, and I picked it up and there is this interview and I thought “o, interesting,” and so I read it. She said that she is really, really delighted to be visiting Richmond because he had lived here when she was a little girl and she has wonderful memories about Richmond. Specifically, she said “my family used to go to Melarn Roads Tea Room to see Santa Clause. And then we go across the street to Thalhimee’s to see the real Santa.” It is terrible but that pleased me. I showed it to my wife and Sib, she is quite a bit younger than I am, and I am a dinosaur when it comes to emails and things like that. But she emailed the girl and actually, I sent her copies of the Santa books and she came right back with a copy of her book and was telling me specific recollections about seeing me and all that kinds of stuff. Which was really kind of neat. I tell you, it has been an exciting life.

PZ: It definitely sounds like it!

GC: And it is not over! I have got a lot more to do.

PZ: What are you working on right now, if it is not a secret?

GC: No, it is not. I have been very exposed to Japan, very exposed to Southeast Asia. As a result of this abduction, I am somewhat familiar with Africa – that is where the kids were. That is where we got them back from. They were in what is now Zimbabwe – it was Rhodesia then, a wonderful country. At any rate, I am aware of a lot of things, internationally. I feel a great responsibility to try to do something. Mahatma Gandhi once said “if we are ever to have real peace in the world, we must start with the children.” What I am doing is I am writing a book - it is 49 letters. Santa, who lives in the North Pole, writes to Saint Nicolas in Italy. And he says “it is obvious that you and I are headed to the same direction, have the same interest. Don’t you think that it would be kind of neat to try and sit down, talk it over, and try to be more effective?” Nicolas writes back, “Great idea, love it!” So, in the course of 49 letters what they do is they exchange background. Everybody knows about Saint Nicolas; very few people know really what happened in terms of Santa. Santa is a younger; he did not come into existence until 1653. Nicolas is 1667 years old. He was born in December 6 343. Then what they do is they discuss their objectives. It turns out the unstated objective is identical and that is world peace where everyone has an equal opportunity for fulfillment. No guarantees – just
the opportunity. But they are approaching it from different points of view. And then they
decide it is really almost a waste of time targeting adults. Let us target children. And how are
we going to do it? That is, as I mentioned to you earlier, how these three books come together.
Because what you are doing is you encourage this child to ask four questions – “Is there a
Santa” – “Yes,” “Is there more than one” – “Yes,” “Are you one” – “Yes,” “May I be one” –
“Yes.” What you are doing is you are helping this child transcend from a pleasure of selfish
receiving to the pleasure of selfless giving. This is crucially important because when you get
groups of people working together to accomplish a purpose, if they are all acting in terms of
“what is good for me,” you end up strive. If they think in terms of “what is good for us,” then
things can happen. That is what I am trying to accomplish and how I do it is I make this
imaginary world so attractive that a little kid cannot stand it, he has got to be a part of it. You
make him want to give and you lead him to an understanding of why this is important. We
were talking earlier about marriages. There are two people involved. There is a me and a them
– the two spouses. Actually, what is important is the we. It is the both of them together. Let
me put it this way. There was an excellent book written by an Australian years ago. What he
said, and I am paraphrasing it but it is basically correct. What he said was that of all the
governments in the past and current, there is no method of government more leis with greed
than democracy is currently practiced because the voter invariably votes for self-interest. The
hack with everybody else. So, you end up where a beautiful concept that everybody votes to
take an action in a direction that is going to be good for everybody ends up actually not being
very efficient. But the problem is not the system, the problem is the individual. So, what I am
thinking is if I can train children to look beyond them, then maybe I can have an influence. At
any rate, then, Nick comes back and says, “this is a pretty good idea – getting to the kids and
teaching them to be selfless. You as a Protestant, me as a Catholic, we can hit roughly one third
of the world. What about the other two thirds?” Santa says, “You like to read, I like to read,
you are not aware of it but there are 67 of us.” And there are. There are 67 gift givers in the
world. And they cut across all lines – be they religious, ethnic, whatever. All of them basically
have the same objective and that is training children to be better people. Nick comes back and
says, “Gosh, if that is true, why don’t we create an organization?” “Ok, what do we call it?”
Well, St. Francis wrote a beautiful poem one time “let there be peace on Earth, and let it begin
with me.” So, why don’t we take that and say “let there be peace on Earth, and let it begin with
us.” And as us is the 67 gift givers and what we will do is we will hopefully acquaint children
and, hopefully, get the cooperation of the adults and move in that direction. Of course, the
initial reaction of people will say “this is against human nature! It is not going to happen.” The
combination of the book brings it back to reality. Because Nicolas, who is over 16 hundred
years old, says to Santa “I have reviewed the plan. There is absolutely no question on my mind,
it is brilliant, and it could work. But after 1600 years of limited success, I tend to be skeptical.
Do you think it will happen?” Then, Santa comes back to Nick and says, “Look, I told you at the
outset. I am not a human; I have never been a human. I have always been a spirit. But I
understand humans and this is how they function. They adopt an objective, they start working
towards that objective, every day – little victories, little defeats, little victories, little defeats.
They may have to alter their objectives slightly but as long as they persist, they will overcome.
Immediately, there will be that feeling of euphoria. I did it! Then it will be like the song – is

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that all there is? So, will we attain a world of peace where everyone has an equal opportunity for fulfillment? Probably not. But, as it has been said many times, the trip is the reward. And those of us will have a great deal of satisfaction out of knowing that we move in that direction.”

So, that is it. And I am hoping it will be good.

PZ: I am sure it will be.

GC: Lord knows if I have anything to say about it, it is going to be. I am sorry I got a little emotional but I feel pretty strongly.

PZ: Thank you so much for this. It was incredibly nice of you.

GC: Good.