

Interview with Marion Goldwasser
Recorded on September 3rd, 2018

Marion Goldwasser: So after it was clear that I'd gone through all the avenues that I could in the county, and I'd come to a dead end that's when I asked for help from the English Association. I can't remember Joyce's last name but she was at Radford. Any problems people had with censorship, she would help. She came down and she talked to the school. And they were saying, that I should be fired for insubordination.

Ryan Wesdock: The school board was saying that?

MG: Uh-huh. And my good friend [Shelby Puckett], who was assistant principal at the time, had kept the letter I wrote on the very first day that this started, saying, oh I was sorry I put them in a bad position that this was...I never intended to...that I would never teach the book and blah blah blah. And then that afternoon, after talking with Marshall Leatch who was kind of our, he's not a lawyer but he's a legal representative for teachers. He said no don't do that. Ask for that letter back. He said as a teacher you need to be able to defend your choices. You need to be able to fight for a book just like you'd fight for a student, or whatever. That's your curriculum; you chose it with a purpose. So I wrote that and Shelby said let me just keep this letter. Well I couldn't grab it out of her hand. So when Joyce went to the school board, there it was! She said she wasn't..That was a hard thing. That hurt our friendship for about three years. Big time. Which is another interesting sideline that the nearer people were to me, the more they kept their distance. People at the high school just didn't want to be seen talking with me. Whereas Radford, I think UVA, Tech, had taken out permits to march at Carroll County in defense of the book.

RW: Students? Teachers?

MG: I guess they were students, maybe teachers, I don't know. There was a lot of support further away. And built up, as you saw, was over four months that this was in the papers all the time, which gave people a chance to hear about it and think, well maybe this isn't a good thing. So they were saying it was insubordinate and that I should be fired. And Joyce said, let me give you a definition of insubordinate. Marion has not been insubordinate. You never gave her a rule, nor did she have a rule that she had broken. and let me tell you something else, you have about one week max before this breaks nationwide. She said, I've heard reporters - and that's what you made me think of when you said the New York Times [National Coalition Against Censorship article], I didn't know that - but she said I have seen reporters from all over the country that are interested. Is that what you want for Carroll County? And that's when they said woah! Woah! They way they handled this, they decided to take it through the grievance committee, you know the complainant, the father [Wade Humphrey] who was complaining, agreed. But that never

would have happened if she had come and said this thing was going to blow up all over the country. It was going to put Carroll County in a very bad light.

RW: So the school board tried to do a lot to, basically, keep a lid on things? Not let the media in on what was going on?

MG: They wanted to control the media. The first thing that happened when - I think it was when Channel 10 came - and the principal [Harold Golding] called me into the office and said I want you to disappear. I don't want them to be able to talk to you. He said, "I'm going to handle this." And then I looked at that interview that evening - and there were some words in there. I love that. There were some words - and he said we're not going to be teaching this again. Then I thought woah, I got to speak up because you can't let that be the defining feature of your teaching that you didn't know what you were choosing and that you chose something horrible. You know they both approved the book, the principal and the assistant principal.

RW: Can you talk a little bit about the reasoning behind your choice of the *Floatplane Notebooks*? Why you felt that was good for the classroom?

MG: There were a couple of things. One, I had taught it very successfully with my Honor's - 11th grade. I thought it was a very good introduction to a sort of Faulknerian approach to writing. Because Faulkner had many characters, many voices, and this had even a grapevine talking. Second, like Faulkner - and I think this is important for all students but particularly students that aren't big readers - because you know where I got in trouble with this book was in the regular English class. Anyway, I thought it was a voice that they were used to, country boys in North Carolina which is very similar to Southwest Virginia. There was a lot of humor in it and it covered a period they surely were affected by because so many people from Appalachia went to fight in Vietnam. So often it's the poor people who end up having to fight. Their fathers, grandfathers, a lot of them they could have asked about and seen, yes, that's who that was. And then it was funny and I think that's always good to engage students. And I like the way you could almost read it like a soap opera. We read it out loud a lot of times, and there was a different voice each chapter.

RW: Did different students take on the different roles?

MG: Yes, yes. They really liked it and it was the first and only book I asked them to buy. And it was very reasonable it was like \$4 because the paperback had come out and this was hardback sitting in and not being sold. And the interesting thing was that when the principal came after all this started blowing up. He said he'd buy their books back from them. What did they pay for it? How many of them were ordering their books tomorrow? One hand went up.

RW: He came into the classroom to do this?

MG: Yes! Not one person was willing to sell their book. Now, to me that's a very incredible fact. Because they're not readers, they don't particularly like the books. They wouldn't have bought this book if not for class, but they refused to let him have it. Even for money, to get their money back.

RW: Do you think that was just because they enjoyed reading it? That much?

MG: I think it was partially that they enjoyed reading it, I think it was partially adolescents fighting authority. I had a good relationship with my students so they aren't going to be out to get me.

RW: There was a period of time before the book went through the review process. Were you still teaching the book after that point? How did you continue even doing lesson plans? Everything you would have planned would have been interrupted by the fact of the controversy.

MG: We were almost finished when the controversy erupted and as I remember we finished it. It didn't take long to finish it. But then the controversy kept spinning out because they wanted to ban the book. Even the solution at the end wasn't a particularly great one. The only reason I liked the solution was because they did take it through the committee and I think all books deserve a hearing. And the committee made what they thought was a reasonable judgement, which kind of acknowledged that the book wasn't a horrible book. It was ridiculous decision because what they said was that it could be taught in 12th grade not 11th. You know 12th grade is British literature and this is American literature. And I don't even know if they knew that. I doubt they knew it. And then they said it [?] taught to advanced students - like advanced placement - and not the regular, because of the material in it. For me, I always found my regular students were much more grown-up in many ways than the advanced students who had toed the line for what their parents wanted, were working towards college - and I don't know if this makes sense - but some of those girls had already had sex in the sixth grade when they were in my regular English class. But they knew about sex, they knew about children, they knew about all this kind of stuff that perhaps the advanced students knew but they were much more focused on their learning. So I felt for so many reasons it was more appropriate, or as appropriate for regular English.

RW: How did the students react to all this? They're in the classroom. They're seeing the principal come in and offer to buy back the book. Then they're seeing this on the news. What was their kind of reaction?

MG: A lot of students, especially in my Honor's class, wanted to support me and come to the school board and fight for it. I told them that I really appreciated that but it wasn't their fight. I didn't want to put them in the middle of it all. I just felt that it wasn't a good thing to do. The regular English students, they did not talk to me a lot about how they felt about the whole thing, to be honest. I didn't talk to them a lot about it in class because I just felt like it wasn't appropriate to try to get them onto one side or the other or make them feel one way or another. They knew me. They knew the book. They can make their own minds up. I know the father who brought the complaint had overheard his son talking to a friend saying "have you read page blah blah," and he said let me see that book. And that's something that lots of times happens in censorship. They pick out one page. And they don't read the whole book. And that page was photocopied and handed around.

RW: I find that a very bizarre thing to do. I've read the book and I found the offending paragraph and page. It just amazes me that the answer that people came up with who were trying to censor it. Let's just spread it around. Let's get everyone to see it - this thing we want no one to see. That's a very interesting way to do that

MG: It really was strange. To me, if you read the whole book, the one that they find offending because that's the one father pointed out when he heard his kids, was when Meredith is shot down. He's lying in the hospital and his wondering how his wife is going to make love to him because she won't want to be on top. That was it. And they said they're going to read that and they're run off into the woods and have sex. Most of my friends said, I cried when I read that. It's not stimulating in any way. It's horrible. But the scene, if you read the whole book, that they never got to was when Meredith's sister-in-law came in, after he was crippled. Do you remember that? And she put on a silk jacket and I think she masturbated him, because he couldn't do anything. And that scene I could see people saying, "woah!" but they never got to that scene. And even that scene, I guess it depends how you feel about sex, but it seemed to me a very sweet thing that she did that – that she cared enough about him that she would do something that relieved him, made him feel better, made him feel cared about. But anyway, there we are.

RW: I think some point in your description, in your article of the event, you mention something about the value of showing students reality, more or less. War is not a pleasant thing.

MG: That was another thing that a parent complained about. I think it was maybe the mother of Gerald [Humphrey]. Gerald was the one whose father raised the complaint. She was in when I had to defend the book to the school board. In fact, they filmed that, I think. I think it was on television. Anyway, she said "it doesn't even have good English!" I said, "you know, there's a purpose. It's like *Huckleberry Finn*. When you're writing colloquial English, when you're writing dialect of what a person's saying, you write the way the person said it. It doesn't mean the whole

book is poorly written. So what you're looking at is what the character said, not what the author said.” But the interesting thing with her is after I had talked for an hour, she said, “She makes this book sound good!” which I thought was a real compliment. She didn't see that as complimenting me or saying, “we made a mistake.” She said, “She's just twisting things to make it sound like a good book.” That father though, I tell you one of the most interesting things for me. He had talked with me earlier in the year and said that Gerald wouldn't listen to him. He was in a Sunday school class and all the other Sunday school students would listen to him, but her wouldn't. He was really worried about him and what she he do and blah blah blah. Very controlling. I wish I could remember where I read this, but I'm sure you'd come across it and I don't know if I put that in the article but a lot of people don't want their students to be taught to think. A lot of people don't want that. When they go to school, they just learn what they have to learn – the facts – and let their parents do anything else that has to be taught about value or whatever. But even giving students choices, giving them ways of seeing different realities, that is not a plus for them at all.

RW: Did you view that as part of the value of having the book was, not just the literary value, but the broader perspective they would gain?

MG: Absolutely. I mean teachers in rural communities, especially – this is true elsewhere I know it's true here – there's kind of a real suspicion of teachers. Who do they think they are? Just because of their education they think they're better than us? On the other hand, they look up to teachers. There's kind of that dichotomy. So when I first came to the county...

RW: When was that?

MG: In '69.

RW: So you'd been here almost thirty years.

MG: Yeah I'd been here a long time. That was a very hard thing because I built up this reputation and it was just being torn down. I have to tell you that, except for the death of my son (and I probably put that in the article) it was the worst thing that happened in my life. It was horrible. Now I look back and think it was an amazing learning experience, but at the time it just devoured my life. I worried about my daughters because one was in Kindergarten one was still at the babysitter's, but I had some women call me up (did I put that in there?) “We're gonna get you and get you good!” And I thought, boy, what if they did something to Sarah? I just, I don't know. People are nuts. I know in West Virginia they were blowing up school buses over a book, which makes no sense. You kill your children because of a book a teacher chose? That was before all of ours. It might have been in the '70s. We had trouble before with a book called the Responding

series.

RW: I've heard about this. That was out in Washington County? Or was that here too?

MG: It was here. They gathered up all of our books, made me go home in the middle of the teaching day and get my teacher's edition. I mean, really? I can't have the book I want? We're going to burn them.

RW: They were going to burn all the textbooks?

MG: They were going to burn all the textbooks. We got it so they didn't burn them; they gave them away. They went through the library. They picked somebody [???] to see if there are any books they should get out of the library and she had no education, no business going through them. She was supposed to find witchcraft, stuff like that.

RW: So that seems different than the Floatplane Notebooks case because that was one particular book, this seems like this was a broader target.

MG: That one started off with the *Responding* series that was being taught by two of us in 11th grade. Well you know what they did? It was really crazy. In West Virginia when they got rid of them, they said "it's not teaching our values." They said, "for example, for us a policeman is somebody we know, we go to church with, but look at this story and he's set up as the enemy." It was an urban story – I don't even remember what it was. They were talking about our values are different than the values that are being shown in this book, which to me has some merit. At least they read it and they thought about it and they thought what it was teaching their children. When it got to this county what they did was they counted all the words that they thought were offensive words. 32 mentions of damn. Which I think is just an incredibly stupid way to analyze a book. And I even had a mother call me up and say I don't want my daughter reading this book for AP English, unless she goes through, she needs to mark all the bad words. Really? That sounds like a good solution. She's reading them anyway!

RW: What was the book designed to teach? It was an English textbook, it was designed to teach any kind of English? Language Arts?

MG: Yes, yeah. I think it was for tenth grade and it just had bunches of stories in it, you know what you'll get in an English class. Then you buy your novels sort of separately, or maybe they have a whole stack of those novels to hand out. But yes, it was a textbook.

RW: I did hear something similar. I spoke with Paul Dellinger of the Roanoke Times. He was

talking about how the book was banned, I think, out in Washington [county]. It was a similar thing where they had gone through, “well we'll raid the library too at the school get all those books,” and then they went to the public library right after that. It always tends to escalate.

MG: Escalate, well that's what it sort of did here. I don't know that she got to the public library, but the librarians were pretty nervous let's just say that. I like Paul a lot. What happened with this after a while is no matter where I went or what I did it became a story. And someone said to me, it's been a good seller for them. It's like how you have a piece of cheese and you see how much people like it and you cut it thinner and thinner and thinner and thinner. You're just shaving off pieces. And he said that's what they do with anything that happens in this story because people like reading it. The other thing I think happens in newspaper, television, whatever the media, is once they've established certain facts, whether they're right or wrong, and once they've established the characters and the parameters of the story, nobody can change it. Once it's out there, no matter what facts come in, that's the story.

RW: What narrative did you see being set up?

MG: Well even if you looked at the photographs, they had me over here, I think they even said I had a Master's, you know, Master's from Stanford English teacher here, and over there they had third grade education, self-proclaimed preacher. So you have really educated versus uneducated; somebody from outside the county, somebody from inside the county. And then both of us with these really horrible pictures

RW: It seems like something that still gets thought about.

MG: Everybody heard about it. And there was a run on those books. Everyone wanted to buy them, so the bookstores were saying this was great for business. Well the books that have been banned, I'm sure you've found out, it's almost unbelievable which books have been banned. You have to say what is it that bothers people? *Huckleberry Finn*'s a big one and then people say oh it's because it says nigger and speaks of Jim in sort of a disparaging way. Other people early on, I think, said it puts on a pedestal people who are fighting authority and fighting society, good people in society. Not wearing shoes, you know. You sort of have to think of your audience and you don't always. I thought they'd love it. I taught *Huck Finn* in East Africa when I was in the Peace Corps and they didn't think it was funny at all, not at all. And what do you think it was that they didn't like about it?

RW: I don't know. I would think even some students today would struggle to get some of the context for the humor because they weren't there. Was it just a cultural context...?

MG: Absolutely! You're right and I didn't think of that. They thought, why would anyone, because they worked so hard to go to school and they had to pay (or they did then), so why would anybody turn down a nice house and nice shoes and nice clothes and a free education to just run away? So they just saw that as horrible. Yeah this book isn't funny at all. This guy's crazy! Cultural context is very important. It doesn't mean you can't do it [teach a book] but it does mean you have to be aware of it so that you introduce that book in such a way that it will be acceptable, hopefully.

RW: What do you think were parts of the culture here that convinced a lot of people to oppose the book or at least some portion of the..I don't know. To what extent do you think there was actually opposition to the book too?

MG: The opposition to the book was pretty interesting. The guy, you know the father...

RW: Is this the Humphreys?

MG: The Humphreys yeah. He immediately called the guy who was the preacher who was set up. The truth was it much...They were many layers and I think I talked about. There's a guy who lives not too far from here, who, I think he'd gone to Liberty University and Jerry Falwell offered to fly him up there back and he was working with them. I overheard some people say after a school board meeting, "Now we got to plan where we go next." So I think the idea was that you, you get into the school system, you get into the county. If it was negative you might say infiltrate, if it was positive, spread the word, get rid of the bad things or something. But it was kind of a, start on a low level or low level of government and we'll be a whole movement. After that the Tea Party came in, not related to that but, a lot of people were thinking, our values are getting away from us. Things are changing us and kids aren't respecting us the way they used to. So there was a real concern about that, which there still is.

RW: Was there something that happened in the county that made that moment particularly ripe? Or was it just a slow build-up perhaps?

MG: That's a good question. I don't think there was anything that happened. In the churches, in the religion, you have everything from Holy Order to, there's an Episcopal church over in Galax, a Catholic church in Woodlawn and a lot of Presbyterians, Baptists, and so forth. We have a friend who feels like television made a huge difference in imparting values that weren't necessarily values of the community. I'm not saying television's the only thing. I think there are a lot of things that made people...and it sort of came to a head with that. I do know when I first came to the county I was working as a home school counselor. And I was supposed to bring ideas about their child from the school to the parents and information, concerns, and so forth

back to the teacher. It ended up with me taking them home after school and I don't know how this started but everyone made me dinner. One family actually redid their whole kitchen before I came. So you have the teacher in some ways up on a pedestal. The teacher's coming to our house and she's having dinner with us. But then you have like this guy, the preacher, said this woman who was flown in from Pennsylvania came from Hell. Instead of being invited to their house for dinner I was invited to a tent meeting he did. He was a self-proclaimed preacher. It was filled with chairs, but only his two daughters, his wife, himself, maybe one other person and me were there. I was wearing a skirt that came down to my calves, you know, a midi-skirt with boots. And his daughters were both wearing skirts that were very, very high - very high. One of things he was talking about was the evils of fashion, people trying to follow the evils of fashion and wearing long skirts. It didn't have to be logical at all.

RW: Just to clarify, he was complaining about the skirts being *too* long?

MG: Yes! Well he was complaining about people trying to be fashionable, what he saw as trying to be fashionable. There I was coming in with this long skirt. Why didn't I dress just like everyone else in a miniskirt. The idea in those kinds of situations is they keep directing at you and how bad you are and then, "Who wants to come forward and be saved?" I didn't go forward to be saved from my midi-skirt. That was a bust in his mind. He had the whole sermon directed right at me and I didn't come and get saved.

RW: What year?

MG: Well it was '69.

RW: So it was the first year it came down.

MG: M-hm. It was. And nothing came from it. But he did say that I had all these relationships with 11th grade boys

RW: Is that what he accused you of?

MG: That's what he accused me of. What's going on in that person's mind that he came to that? And I actually saw him during all this back-and-forth in the newspaper and television and radio. He was in the produce section of Food Lion. He was tall and he saw me coming and I was going to go speak to him. I went up and he put his head down. He practically dove into the cabbages. I thought, isn't that interesting? He attacks me for weeks in the paper but he can't look at me in person. I can't remember, there were five people and the superintendent and principal were talking to me. The superintendent said, "Well you didn't see them! You didn't see them! They

were wearing suits!” Like anybody wearing a suit who comes to complain is really scary and you have to really back up and change your course of action. I’ll never forget that! “They were wearing suits!” Like, oh, oh *suits*. You’re kidding?

RW: This was [Superintendent Oliver] McBride?

MG: Yeah, yeah. I don’t think I’d want that said about him. I mean, you could. His son was a very close of my daughter’s. She was at his wedding. I like him. One thing I didn’t say in that whole thing was that I was the English supervisor for K-12. They already got I was Teacher of the Year, but I thought I’m not going to make it more awkward for the school board by saying I was the supervisor of English teachers. That was his idea to have four supervisors, English, History, Math, and Science, and meet with the teachers and sort of see where we wanted to go. He had a lot of good ideas, he just didn’t like to ruffle water. He’s always been that way. It makes him very uncomfortable to have any kind of controversy, so if he can put a lid on it he will. My doctor who’s also a preacher on the weekend, came in to school one morning. I said, “Hey Dr. Deboe,” and he looked right through me. Right through me. So one of the students in my AP class told me her mother, who worked for him as a nurse, and he had seen that one page and was showing it. He was going to do something about it. He didn’t read anything else in the book. Did I say that in that article that he came into the school and that he wanted to do a program for the whole student body?

RW: Yeah, you mentioned there was some sort of film. What did he want to show?

MG: He wanted to show what he considered the right way of presenting Vietnam veterans.

RW: What movie? I assume it wasn’t *Full Metal Jacket*. I assume it was...

MG: I have no idea what it was. I don’t know. I don’t know! That was the thing, Shelby would, my friend who was also giving papers to the school board would tell me things then go tell the school board things. I don’t think she was trying to be duplicitous or mean. She was just - she didn’t want to lose her position, but we had been friends for a long time. So it was kind of like ahhhh. She’d tell me a little bit of this, little bit of that... Whatever it was the only reason they didn’t take the whole student body to see it was they were doing testing. Out of that whole student body, which was a thousand, I was teaching, there were only thirty kids in that class reading it.

RW: But they were going to have everybody watch the rebuttal?

MG: Everybody would watch this, yeah. So it's an interesting groundswell that happens, that people get very worried. They don't know what's going to happen. A lot of people in the school were talking if they were seen with me they would lose their jobs or they'd get in trouble. The librarian remembered what had happened with *Responding* and said "I'm so glad it's you, that you'll fight for us. Anything I can do let me know." And the next thing I knew she's reporting everything I said to the office. And it was a fear. It didn't even make sense. If you could put your finger on what is the fear. I don't think anybody could actually tell you. There was just this sort of unfocused fear that I don't want to be part of this, something bad might happen to me. It's the same kind of thing if somebody had a complaint they'd always ask me to go to the school board for them. I said it doesn't make sense for me to do that. It make much more sense if each person who has something to talk about goes. Then it seems more meaningful than one person galloping up there every other week. So there's this sort of pervasive unease. I think that's a big part of how that thing blows up. In this county too, and I think a lot of Southwest Virginia, there's a lot in the church about sins of the body. It manifested itself in strange ways like a lot of students - girls - didn't want to wear gym clothes because that would be revealing your body. Girls didn't like to raise their hand and say they had to go to the bathroom when I first came because that's talking about their body. So when you have that attitude you don't really have an open attitude towards love and sex. So that's mentioned in a book and woah probably not going to be welcomed. Everybody thinks, I've been to school I can tell everybody what to do in the classroom and there's not the sense that the teacher is a professional. That was sort of my main reason for wanting to fight for it. It wasn't that this book was God, you know, the best book in the whole world. If a teacher is going to be professional, they should act as one which means they should have a very good reason for the materials that they use and how they teach them. But also laymen shouldn't be able to come in and decide what's going to be taught and what isn't going to be taught. There should at least be a hearing and that's what I thought was so important about following that hearing. What I've found from then - I think it's important to do - I always had a syllabus and I always had the books but I send out something with the students that they have to get signed that please look at the materials that we're going to be using in the class. If you have a problem with any of them I'd be happy to meet with you. Or if you want to fill out this form, tell me what there is about this particular book or whatever it is that you object to, and what you would prefer your son or daughter read instead. They can make that choice, but their choice still has to relate to the purpose of the book to begin with. For example, I had a parent in North Carolina who objected to *Night*, Elie Wiesel's *Night* which is about the Holocaust. I couldn't figure out what it was and I thought maybe she was anti-semitic, I really didn't know what was it in that book that she objected to. So the form asked them: Did you read the book? If so, which pages or what scene was objectionable to you? And what would you like down about this? Would you like your daughter to just skip those pages or something? Or do you want to have me choose another book? Or you choose another book? This woman wrote, "My husband has a Master's degree and teaches in the community college. He's been teaching for years and no

I didn't read the book. Why should I read the book? You can't tell me what to do." She ended up suggesting Viktor Frankl's *The Will to Live* which is dense, dense, very complex philosophical book about what makes some people want to live when they're in a concentration camp and what people give up. I mean it takes you hours on one page. I said, "Fine, if that's what you want your daughter to read. She can present that to the class." She was talking about what she didn't like was that there was too much violence and we had just finished *All Quiet on the Western Front*. I mean give me a break! You had people like hamburger on the wall and horses' guts spilling out in *All Quiet* and there's no violence at all in Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Nothing. I mean, they're in a concentration camp but he doesn't go into any graphic detail at all. But I do think it's important you give parents a voice and let them say no I don't want my child to read this. I had a student in AP in North Carolina who was Mormon. She didn't like all the books. I said, "You can choose another." She said, "No, I need to see why this is great literature and be able to talk about it." I said, "That's great. You say whatever you think."

RW: At one point I was going through the school board minutes for all of this. McBride at the end when the Screening Committee came up with this decision and that decision was approved for the partial ban. He said the school board needed to kind of balance what he called the privilege of allowing teachers to select classroom materials with the rights of parents to place their kids in a quality education program. Do you think that partial ban was that effective balance? Or...?

MG: It sounds good. He came to me and said, "if you just drop this," he said, "I'll put you in charge of rewriting our policy on censorship and you can do anything you want." Well, Mike [Goldwasser] said to me, "well he's not following this policy why would he follow yours if you rewrite it?" Which is perfectly true. I like what he said, that's good. If he really had felt that way he would have had us get together and he would have had us go through the book policy that we had. Then he would have given some credence to me as the teacher who selected the book and let me explain why and what was going on and also let the parents speak. Then let them decide. I don't think that's the way he handled it at all. It just sounds good. I mean, I went to his office and he didn't want anybody from the Virginia Education Association or Carroll Education [Association]. He didn't want anybody there. He said Mike was okay. Mike's a farmer. He went to Carlton [?]. He went to Penn Law School then decided he didn't want to do law. His father's a physicist. His mind is just like, nobody I know. But he thought he'd sit up there like "uhhhhh." I don't know why everybody on a farm's supposed to be dumb. He didn't talk to Mike; Mike sat there. But he told me, he said, "do you know what's happening now? Do you know what's happening?" And he picked up a book, you know, like huge encyclopedias and smashed it on the table that was about *that* far from me. I mean, it was clearly - I know he was frustrated - but it was also a very...It was meant to intimidate. It was meant to...really what he would have liked to

have done is taken the book and smashed it on my head I'm sure. I mean it was as close to me as he could have gotten. Even to be smashing books around the office seems to me out of control.

RW: I can understand the idea of controversy makes things that normally go smoothly enough don't go as smoothly, but do you think that's really what it came down to for why he was so frustrated?

MG: Absolutely! His wife Vivian called me and she said, "won't you please just settle all this?" Just let it go away?" She said, "Oliver's been crying all weekend and he's in the bathroom and he won't let me come in and he's crying. I love Vivian. I love the children. I like Oliver! But that wasn't the point! I wasn't trying to be mean and take his toys away. That's why I said what he said sounds good, but that's not what he did. He just panicked. He told me, he said - My brother who, he teaches, he's a Presbyterian minister I think and he teaches in University. I can't remember which one in North Carolina - and he said, "Oliver, I read that book and I like it a lot." and he said, "My mother read the book too." and he [Oliver] said, "I know it's a good book." it's like oh shit happens, but I don't want it to happen to me. He wanted to do the right thing, but he doesn't like the conflict. I think a lot of maybe superintendents...I don't know how a lot are. I think it's..you have to make the public happy; you don't want a lot of bad press. So if you can just put a lid on things...And really the thing to make everybody happy is to have a good policy and follow the darn thing. And I didn't even think about a policy until we got into this thing. I don't even know if we had a policy. And that's something that I think all teachers, especially teachers of English - maybe teachers of History - Maybe all teachers - should know what is our censorship policy and how do you plan to handle any complaint that you get at the beginning of the year. You make compromises. The AP History teacher was running around telling everybody there were going have a reduction in their pay if they didn't fight against what I was doing. He was on the committee.

RW: The Screening committee?

MG: The textbook committee, uh-huh.

RW: Who else was on the committee? I guess there were teachers. I thought there were just...

MG: Parents and teachers, yeah. One parent was Janet Tate and she was a good friend of mine - a little ditz. She thought she'd be in the public eye. She really loved that. It was really exciting to be a part of this. And really...It really didn't matter who was on the committee. It was fine. The important thing is if people complain about a book, give them a chance to select another. If it gets to the point where it has to go through the committee then I think that should happen right away. Oh you have a complaint? Let's see what the committee says.

RW: Didn't the parents have to buy the books, though? They have to at some point know that they were...

MG: I think the students just bought them.

RW: Oh, really? Okay. Interesting.

MG: I mean I learned a lot from that. I never thought about parents objecting. The National Council of Teachers of English also has a form you can just download and use.

RW: Was the controversy part of your decision to leave the school district here and move elsewhere. I know you did that a couple years....

MG: I did. No, I don't think that was the ultimate [reason for the] decision. I was on that committee, four of us, that were supervisors. I thought I've done that for four years. You know the teachers meet, they have these great ideas. I bring them to the school board. I bring them to the Principals. I bring them to the Superintendent. Nothing happens. Nothing happens. They don't even get a response to their requests or whatever it was they were talking about. That's embarrassing, too. You get the teachers to come all the way to school afterwards, they don't go home, they come to a meeting. They think about it. You write it down. Well what happened? Nothing. I thought I'm in a position - I don't think I'll ever be in a better position - to make changes and make differences. And I can't do anything. For four years, I can't do anything. So I thought I'd like to go to a school where I thought I'd have more of an impact.