

**Dave Hitchens**  
**Interviewed by John McLain**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
**May 26, 2011**  
**FINAL**

**Hitchens:** Where do you want to start?

**McClain:** You were born. [laughter] I did read a little bit of an essay that I don't know if you wrote, but about your mother and her influence on you. She sounds like an amazing woman.

**Hitchens:** Because she was my mother, I truly didn't appreciate her at the time. I was just a kid. The thing that has come home to me over the years is how much she kept from me.

**McClain:** Kind of protected you?

**Hitchens:** I guess she decided—and I got this from my aunt, because they were both sent to Haskell together, and my aunt characterized it as—I think there's a quote in there I used from her—she used to call it “that awful government school.” She said my mother came out of that experience changed. She was seemingly—all I can do is add to it—look at it and say she was depressed, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was she was a single mother at a time when that just wasn't happening, especially in Oklahoma.

Whatever her hopes and dreams had been as she was growing up—and she used to regale me with stories—there were four of them, two boys, two girls—and their experiences. They befriended baby skunks and whatnot, things like that, in the Northwoods. I could tell her childhood had a certain charm to it that she sort of tried to pass on to me.

She never said anything, other than she told me that she had been in nurse's training at the University of Kansas when she met my dad. But then I found out that wasn't true. They would take students who wanted to study nursing from Haskell, take them over to the KU campus, and then take them back. But her way of explaining it was to completely ignore the Haskell side of it.

**McClain:** So she was really second-class kind of?

**Hitchens:** Right, and she never really recovered from that experience, and apparently decided that she was going to do everything possible to keep me from having to deal with that sort of stuff. She would

say things to me, as I said in that essay, one of the earliest things I ever remember her saying to me was, “When you go to college.” It was never if you go, or I really hope you go, it was when you go.

**McLain:** And this was a time when that’s a pretty audacious hope for anybody but an upper-class person.

**Hitchens:** Especially folks coming out of Oklahoma at the time.

**McLain:** And Indian country.

**Hitchens:** And because she rejected the whole Native background that she had, there was a big blow-up in my family, and I never understood why until years later. I pieced it together by sort of triangulating what I could remember of the moment and things that happened afterwards.

There were some significant moments afterwards. When I was about, I think, going into second grade, there was a huge blow-up. We were living with my grandparents, and there was a huge blow-up late at night. The next thing I knew, I was being awakened and hustled out. They threw some clothes on me and packed a bag, and we jumped into this cab and went down to a hotel in downtown Tulsa. Something had happened. There was something going on in the family. Then we ended up moving around before we finally settled back down a few years later, and I was back in the Ben Franklin Elementary School District where I’d started kindergarten. But I never understood what was going on there.

One spring day, a Saturday when I was nine—it was kind of an interesting year between nine and 10 for me—I jumped on my bike and I rode over to see my grandparents on a Saturday. I did that about every other Saturday. We were living close enough that I could go for a bike ride, have a quick visit and then come home, be home in time for lunch. I get to the house, and my granddad was sitting there. He had a television set, and he liked that, and he used to sit there and watch television. I hit the front door and came in and I said, “Hi, Granddad. What’s up?” I think he was watching Ted Mack’s *Original Amateur Hour*, which came to Tulsa a week late. In those days, things came around.

**McLain:** They had to move the film from place to place probably.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, it was before the coaxial cable came in and the coast-to-coast stuff. I said, “Where’s Grandma?” He said, “Oh, she’s at her meeting.” I said, “Her meeting? What meeting?” He said, “Her club meeting. They get together and they hook rugs, and they do a variety of things.” I said, “What club is that?” He paused for a minute and he said, “The Cherokee Women’s Club.” I said, “What’s she going to the Cherokee Women’s Club for?” He said, “Well, because she’s a member, and because she’s

Cherokee, and I'm Shawnee. That makes you Cherokee and Shawnee. By the way, your mother is Chippewa."

All of a sudden, I'm nine years old and I'm hearing something I never knew. Suddenly, I'm Cherokee, Shawnee, and Chippewa. My mother had told me a couple years before at one point—something had come up that I was asking her about—she said, "If anybody asks you, you're an American. You were born in the United States of America. That makes you a citizen of the United States of America, and that's all anybody needs to know."

Anyway, I visited with my granddad, and left before my grandmother got back from the meeting. I rode home, hit the back door, bounced in around lunchtime and I said, "Hey, Mom! Grandpa told me something today I didn't know. It's neat! I didn't know we were Indians." The temperature in the room—you know when you're a kid and you do something, and you don't know what it is, but you know the temperature dropped. My mother's face turned to stone, and I thought, what did I do? I knew I was in deep trouble. She said, in a voice that I can't even begin to duplicate now—suddenly, there was this very low voice—she looked at me and she said, "We're not." She repeated, "You were born in the United States of America. You're a citizen of the United States of America. That's it."

What she did, in effect, was she legislated, or the blow-up in the family may have been because my grandparents—my dad's folks—wanted to get me more involved in things and whatnot, and she was against it. She didn't want that to happen. She didn't want me having to deal with the kind of racism and barriers that so-called half-breeds had to deal with at the time.

**McLain:** She didn't want you to end up at a boarding school somewhere for Indians.

**Hitchens:** My life was going to be different, and I was going to college, plain and simple. That was the first real clear indication I'd had that there was something that nobody was talking about, and it couldn't be talked about. I got the clear impression that I wasn't ever to bring it up again. All that in one morning, and it was like suddenly—and I remember going through a period wondering stuff and wondering, who am I?

I will jump forward. It comes later, but it's still part of the story. When I organized my leave without pay from Evergreen, because I'd been invited over to do a guest shot at Murdoch University, a new university in Western Australia back in '75, I made application for my passport. I had carried with me—because my mother gave it to me—a certificate from St. John's Hospital that had my footprints on it. It was the hospital certificate of my birth.

I think they were doing it at the post office at the time, and I went down to make application for my passport. I had a driver's license, and she said, "We need your birth certificate to verify." I said, "I have it right here." I opened it up and handed it to her and she looked at it and she said, "No, I'm sorry, this won't do. It's not your birth certificate." I said, "It's not? What do you need?" She said, "This is the hospital certificate from St. John's Hospital. These kinds of things are issued as interim things until the State of Oklahoma registered you with their certificate of live birth. What we need is a copy of that with the raised seal of the State of Oklahoma to verify its validity." I went "Oh-h-h." I couldn't do it right then, so she said, "We'll get everything in the preliminary stuff out of the way." I said, "How about if I write to them and have them send you the certificate?" She said, "No, it's better that you bring it down."

So I wrote to Oklahoma, sent them five dollars, and I got it. Opened it up, unfolded it, and it was two documents stapled back-to-back. The front page had stamped at the top, where it said certificate of live birth, the stamp over that said "Amended certificate of live birth." I'm starting to read. There's my mother's maiden name, Frances Marie Hitchens, where she was born and her race: Indian. I read my dad's name, Frank Lowery Hitchens, where he was born, his race: Indian. So, the day I was born, I was born an Indian. It didn't specify which tribe or anything, but that was it.

Turns out that same year when my granddad told me about that, I turned the certificate over, because I thought, well, nothing had been amended on the front. I turned it over on the back, and the back of the amendment had space where my mother had submitted her birth certificate, my dad's discharge papers from the U.S. Navy—he was a World War II veteran—and my racial category had been changed from Indian to white. I had been declared a "legal white man" by the State of Oklahoma. I didn't know this until I was 34 because I was making application at that point.

**McLain:** How was such a thing accomplished?

**Hitchens:** She put those two together, she wrote to the State, sent it to them and said . . .

**McLain:** . . . son of a veteran . . .

**Hitchens:** Right. Because in World War II, you were black, white. That was it. If you weren't black, the State of Oklahoma grandfathered Indian tribes from the various Indian nations there into citizenship by delineating them—they could have the right to vote in the State because they weren't black. Then, of course, after the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment came in, there were quite a few changes, the extent of which how close it was to me, I didn't know until 1963, when I got a note from my dad's mother. She said, "The

government has settled with your grandfather's people. If you write to Tribal Operations in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and get the information, you're in line for some financial settlement."

It turned out there were three small bands of Shawnee. The Shawnee had gotten moved out of Ohio and Indiana and into what became Indian Territory, which then becomes Oklahoma. There were these three small bands. There was the Cherokee Band of Shawnee—which makes it very confusing to some folks at this point—the Absentee Band, and there was one other I could never remember. I always have to look it up.

My grandfather's mother, my great-grandmother—her name was Eliza Hitchens—appears on the census roll taken when the U.S. Army came in. They had done a survey when they were establishing the state line between Kansas and Oklahoma. They came in and discovered that there were these bands of Shawnee who were supposed to be in Oklahoma Territory, but they were living north of the new state line.

March 4, 1889, the Army came in, did a census, and rounded these folks up, and moved them into Oklahoma. My grandfather, who's clear from when I looked it up and figured out the timeframe—my great-grandmother's maiden name was Booth. Her brother was like number two on the list of names. But when her name appears, it's Eliza Hitchens, formerly Booth. She was number three on the original list, and then they changed it because they discovered she was married to my great-grandfather, who, as it turns out, was Cherokee and had been a member of the First Mounted Cherokee Regiment when the Cherokee Nation allied itself with the Confederate States of America in the Civil War. He went to war when he was 15.

At any rate, here it appears this, and I realized when they took the census, my grandfather's name is not on there, but Eliza Hitchens is on there. She must have been pregnant with him. I looked it up and found out that he was born in 1889. He was born after the removal. He was born near or at Guthrie, Oklahoma, which was one of the early capitals of the State. So, there's this tangled weirdness. I got \$230.74, and each child born before, I think, March 1, 1964, got the same amount.

**McLain:** They all got \$230.74?

**Hitchens:** Yeah. What happened is that when the government decided to pay these folks for losing their property, the Cherokee Band, which was my grandfather's—that was Eliza Hitchens's folks—decided they would split the money equally among the descendants of the folks who were on the original roll, so I sent birth certificates in. I'd had one sent from the State of Oklahoma to Tribal Operations, but when they sent that stuff back to—I was teaching in Tennessee at the time all of this

was happening—listed on the documents that were returned to me was an amended certificate of live birth, but it didn't show up. My children's birth certificates—my three oldest children—their certificates came back, but I'd never seen that one that I had sent. For some reason, it didn't come back in the folder that they sent me. But they put me and my three oldest kids on the census roll of the Cherokee Band of Shawnee.

I would have discovered then, back in 1963-64 when this was happening, except there wasn't anything there. And it didn't dawn on me. I went back and I looked at it because I've still got those things. I looked at it one day and I said, why didn't I get curious when I saw my birth certificate was amended? It said amended certificate of live birth. It turns out, she made those changes when I was nine. Ever since I was nine, I was probably the only totally legal white man to be found, because the State of Oklahoma had declared me such as a result of these documents that she had submitted.

She wasn't full-blooded by any means, and I think that was one of the things that puzzled her. Why should she—except she didn't realize that she was living on the reservation, Bad River Chippewa of Lake Superior—when I was seven, I got sent up there. My grandmother, Anne—her mother—was living in Chicago, and she took me into Wisconsin so I could meet a bunch of relatives. It seemed everybody I ran into, they'd look at me and say, "Oh, you're Fran's boy."

She had taken me there, back to Wisconsin, when I was 18 months old, but I didn't remember that. When I was seven and I was meeting people—"This is your cousin, So-and-So"—I was like, how am I related to all of these people? Turns out, there's a good reason for that. My grandmother took me back to the reservation, but it wasn't operating like a reservation the way you would assume a reservation operated. These folks had lived in these areas for quite a while. They had established farms and things, or they were living in towns. But the geographic area that encompasses the Bad River reservation bleeds over into it, and there was an offshoot that was living on the shores of Lake Superior.

When they were talking about it, they said, "You've got to come. You've got to move because you're part of us." They said, "No, we're not moving." So they had to make an exception, so they declared this 10-mile-wide strip of land along Lake Superior—it's the Red something—I want to say Red Hawk Band or something, but they're really Bad River folks.

**McLain:** This is along the north shore? North of Duluth, along the shore there?

**Hitchens:** You know where Bayfield is?

**McLain:** I do.

**Hitchens:** That little peninsula where the Apostle Islands are, that's the area.

**McLain:** So it's Red Cliff.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, the Red Cliff.

**McLain:** I know that area.

**Hitchens:** Do you?

**McLain:** Yeah, my in-laws have a home up there on Madeline Island, and I go there. So she's part of the Red Cliff.

**Hitchens:** My mother's maiden name was Rasmussen. Her mother was Anne LaFournier. Turns out LaFournier, there's a LaFournier Park in New Orleans. He was the last French governor of the Louisiana Territory. When the Spanish took control, they came in and tried to work something out with him, and he organized a revolt, and got arrested and was executed by the Spanish. So there's this park in New Orleans, and some of his descendants ended up in Wisconsin.

**McLain:** Up in the Northwoods area.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, the Northwoods.

**McLain:** Yeah, I've probably been up in that area 15 or 20 times. My wife was born and bred up there.

**Hitchens:** My grandmother's, I think, sister married a guy, Aunt Kate and Uncle Mike. I didn't realize they were great. When I was a kid, I didn't understand that. They were living on a farm a mile and a half south of Lake Superior. They took me to swim in the lake one day after I'd been there two or three days. We walked down this road, and they were telling me about land usage, not explaining it very thoroughly.

But I got ready to swim and this eagle came circling around, flying down. And as I stepped into the water and it was cold, he came down like from here to that doorway, flying in front of me. Uncle Mike said, "Oh, the eagle came to say hello. He's greeting you. That's pretty special." I said, "Wow, I had no idea." I'm this city kid from Tulsa.

So, yeah, again, the Red Cliff—again, on my mother's side of the family, they had an uncle named Leo LaFournier. I don't know how close Leo was to Anne, but that's clearly one of her brothers. But they're in the Red Cliff area. They stayed there.

I found out all this stuff when I discovered my uncle, Oliver, who was my mother's youngest brother. There was Paul, and my mother, and then Oz—or Oliver—and then Jan, in that order. During

World War II, Oz was a radioman/gunner on Dauntless dive bombers and Helldivers, flying off the *USS Shangri-La*. They were on a heckling mission over Hokkaido Island, the northernmost Japanese home island, and he hit a fog bank and smacked into the side of a mountain. Oz was thrown clear. It killed his pilot. He had a separated shoulder and several broken ribs, but he got himself pulled together. He survived and made friends with local dogs. He was stealing eggs and things from the farmers around, and catching frogs and eating raw frog legs. He said later that some of the stuff that he had learned on the reservation had helped him survive. Before he left the Navy—he became a career man—but he became somebody who also trained folks in survival because of the experience that he'd had.

**McLain:** He never got caught by the Japanese?

**Hitchens:** He's only one of two Allied aviators to crash on one of the Japanese home islands and elude capture.

**McLain:** Wow.

**Hitchens:** The day he got captured, it turns out the guys that captured him—he thought they had these big, long rifles—they had bamboo poles—home guards. They had chased him for a while, and he had turned to look back to see how close they were, and he tripped over a root, and falling down, they came up on him. So he gave it up. He had this tattered little dictionary and he was trying to talk to them, tell them he was an American. He said he expected to get beaten and knocked around. He said they were all very polite. They took him into the village, and then they took him from the village down to the coast, where there was a small inlet or something that they could connect. Come to find out, it was two weeks after the signing of the official end of the war on the *Missouri*.

Years later, some guy who was interested in military history had heard about him. He made it through the Korean War, too. Had a very interesting career. Ended up working at the Lawrence Radiation Lab after the war was over with, and had this book written about him. The book's title is *Chippewa Chief in World War II: [The Survival Story of Oliver Rasmussen in Japan]*. So I picked up some more things about my mother's family structure by reading that particular book—again, because nobody is talking about it. There's a photograph of all the kids. It's a fascinating thing.

Anyhow, let's get back. I've really taken us away here. All that background, with my mother's concern and whatnot, when she got to Tulsa after I was born, there was still part of her that every now and then she would scrape together enough funds, and she would register for a class at the University of Tulsa. She took geology one year. A couple years later, she took criminology. That was kind of interesting because I was, again, nine or 10—10, I think—my folks were going somewhere on a Saturday



and they were figuring I was old enough that if I wanted to stay home, why, I could stay home and they probably didn't have to worry about me. I said, yeah, I wasn't interested in whatever it is they were going to do. They said, "We'll be back in a while," and so they left.

I was sitting there with my feet up on the coffee table. I looked over and here's this criminology text. I wonder, what's criminology? That's what Mom's taking. I grabbed the book and opened it up and started to read. They were gone two and a half hours or so, maybe three hours. They got back and I'm still there. I'm mesmerized, reading this college text, and reading about Pretty Boy Floyd and Baby Face Nelson.

I said, "Wow, that was fast." They said, "We were gone about three hours." My dad said, "What are you reading?" I said, "Oh, I'm reading Mom's criminology text." He said, "Oh," and he turned and he went on out. He started to go out of the room and my mother said, "You got any questions? You understand it?" I said, "Yeah. I'm puzzled about one thing." She said, "What's that?" I said, "What's a sexual psychopath?" My dad goes in to get coffee, and my mother's standing there and she says, "Well . . . you might not quite be ready for that yet. We'll sort it out." I had a fairly good idea from the context that I was reading. One or two of these guys had been characterized as such, and I was puzzled. I wasn't sure what that meant at the time. But that kind of stuff was going on with me.

**McLain:** She's taking a class whenever she can scrape together the money.

**Hitchens:** She would take a class.

**McLain:** Was she hoping to get a degree?

**Hitchens:** I have no idea.

**McLain:** But something just, I want to learn.

**Hitchens:** Yeah.

**McLain:** And there she was.

**Hitchens:** It turns out after her death, my stepfather told me—because my folks eventually were divorced and she remarried several years later, and she had another son. He's roughly 25 years younger than me, and we're not really in contact. There's too many years difference to really be able to have any kind of ongoing contact. I've lost my train of thought. Oh! Hans told me that she had left behind this huge stack of journals. She'd been keeping a journal for years.

**McLain:** No kidding? Writing.

**Hitchens:** Writing. I said, “Can you send me some of her stuff? I’d love to get an idea of what she was”—it never happened, never materialized. I think Chris had something to do with that. I made a couple of efforts to have contact with him.

**McLain:** That’s your brother?

**Hitchens:** Yeah, he’s never responded, so that’s that. I can understand that. Genetically, inside my particular family structure and experience, people take stands and they stick to ‘em, by golly. I don’t know if that’s good or bad. Turns out to be pretty good in some instances, and maybe not so good in others.

She came home one day—I was five or six—and she’d found a used bookstore where she could buy for 25 cents, 50 cents, used hardbound books. She came home with a sackful for me—*Robin Hood*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *Black Beauty*, things like that—so I was reading those things at a pretty early age. I read *Moby Dick* for the first time when I was 12. When I was 14, I read *The Grapes of Wrath*. My mother said, “That’s a little rough, isn’t it?” I said, “There’s nothing in there that I haven’t read on public toilet walls all my life.” She said, “Oh, okay.”

I had a lot of curiosity. There’s hardly a day in my life—I fell on a floor furnace and burned my hands when I was 18 months old. I remember for sure—because my dad, who was a fireman, hustled me to the closest fire station where they had ointment that you put on, and bandaged my hands up. I remember, I was sitting on this counter in the kitchen, and there were all these firemen around, and they were trying to cheer me up. I knew then, when I think back on it, I could not read then. The rest of my life, I can’t remember when I could not read. I’ve been reading, and East Tulsa boys aren’t readers.

**McLain:** Did you mom teach you to read at a young age, or did you just teach yourself?

**Hitchens:** I remember going through the process in the first grade, but I also remember seeing things and talking about things, and looking at comic strips before then. It’s kind of a jumble.

**McLain:** The essay mentions that you were, I think the term is outcast. You really felt like you were a bit of an outcast as a learner.

**Hitchens:** That’s partly because when I was in sixth grade at Franklin Elementary, I was walking home. We’d got out of school one afternoon, and it was in early fall. Still warm. We had an underpass at the end of the corner. Franklin’s grounds sat at the intersection of 11<sup>th</sup> and Yale. There was an underpass to get you under Yale—under 11<sup>th</sup>—to the other side. Where we were living, I had to walk about six, eight

blocks, and then a couple blocks to the left, I was home. I walked to and from school unless it was really terrible weather.

I got down to the middle of the underpass and there were these three guys waiting for me—Pat Wynn, Ricky Fugate and one other kid, I can't remember his name—and they blocked me. I was trying to come through, and they stopped me. I said, "What's wrong?" "We want to talk to you." "Why?" They said, "If you don't stop being such a smart aleck, we're going to beat you up every day after school. Because all you do, you're always answering these questions." I looked at him and I looked at all three of them and I said, "One at a time, or all three at once?" I figured I could maybe hold my own one at a time. They said, "All three at once." That's how pissed off they were at me. I went "All right," and then they let me go.

But I got excited about it. We had a sixth-grade teacher, the first male teacher I'd had. He would ask a question and I had the answer. I'd hold my hand up. And I toned it down after that. I didn't want to get beaten up by three guys. I had no idea that there were people in that room that weren't as involved with the learning as I was. And it was real clear in junior high and high school, in those days—they were through the '50s, late '40s into the '50s, because I graduated in '57—it wasn't cool for young guys to be too smart.

We had a guy in school—his name was Bill Jones—and he was a guy who had a slide rule dangling from his belt all the time. He wore glasses. He was clearly pretty smart. People would make fun of him. They'd walk down the hall and say, "Draw, Jones!" Because of his slide rule and things like that. When I realized that I was a reader, I didn't have anybody to talk to, because none of my friends, as far as I knew or thought, had any of the same kinds of interests. They didn't talk about those kinds of things. The most they'd ever talk about was maybe if they'd seen some movie that they had kind of liked, they might want to talk about the movie. But to talk ideas and stuff . . . again, when I was nine, it's like on some levels, I never quit being nine. Joan likes to tease me about that all the time.

But my mother took me over to my aunt's house. They were getting together to have coffee or something. It was a spring day, nice and warm. So while they were having coffee, I went out and sat on the back stoop of my aunt's house. I remember sitting there looking up, and the sky was absolutely clear. It was one of those cloudless days, really blue sky. I remember thinking, here I was looking up at this vastness, and imagining what it was like out there beyond, where you could see the stars—since I understood the rotation of the earth—and where that went, where that led, and what did that mean? I realized, I am so insignificant relative to all of that.

Then there were these other things I remember thinking. But then there are ants and termites and things, and they run around and do things, and they're not even aware of us. And there are things you can't see that are tiny, germs and viruses. I had this moment of feeling a sense of my place in the universe suddenly.

**McLain:** You were how old?

**Hitchens:** Nine. How exciting that was. Well, a few weeks later, we're over at my grandparents' for Sunday dinner. Because it's getting warm—late June, early July—in Tulsa, the weekends are starting to get damn hot. So we would eat late because my grandparents didn't have air conditioning. You'd cook stuff, a roast or something, and let that cool down, serve it, eat. Then my granddad liked to lay quilts out on the backyard, and we'd go out there and lie down and enjoy the cool evening breeze.

I was lying there looking up at the stars, and a week or so before all this, I'd been reading about the bloodstream, and how that operated in the human body, and about red and white corpuscles. I was fascinated with that. Wow, when these white corpuscles fight, they fight disease and things. Back to that business of there's all this out here, and then there's all this tiny stuff. Where does it all go? I'm lying there, and we finished digesting our food, and I was looking up at the stars, just sort of feeling wonderful, thinking and looking up at everything. Back to that vastness.

I remember saying, "Hey, Mom, wouldn't it be neat if, as we were lying here looking up at the stars, that we're living on a corpuscle in somebody's bloodstream, and these things that we think are stars are actually reflections of other corpuscles and whatnot?" It got real quiet, and my grandmother said quietly—I don't think she thought I could hear her—"Fran, where does that boy get those ideas?" [laughter]

**McLain:** Were there teachers along the way who saw your curiosity and your talents?

**Hitchens:** I had a couple when I got to high school who were really supportive. One who sat me down when I was a junior—Mrs. Mauer—I encountered her my sophomore year, my first year in high school. She directed plays and whatnot, and I was in every play from the fifth grade on all through high school. My sophomore, Rogers High had the distinction of putting on the first amateur production of a new play that had been written called *I Love Lucy*. We paid the royalty, and we put it on. We invited Desi and Lucille to come to the opening.

**McLain:** So, before the TV show, there had been a play?

**Hitchens:** No, they wrote the play as a consequence of the TV show. It had just been published, so she jumped on it, and I got cast as Ricky Ricardo. I played Ricky, Anne Cook played Lucy in this. We sent them a telegram inviting them. They sent us an opening night telegram telling us to break a leg and all that kind of stuff, which Mrs. Mauer read to us before the curtain went up.

She sat me down my junior year and she said, "I've noticed something about you. You seem to have a wide curiosity about things, and it seems like you want to know about lots of things. This is a world where you've got to specialize. I don't know how you're going to fit in. You may be able to make it work if you know a whole lot of things about a lot of things. But you also need to recognize that there may be a point you're going to focus in and specialize on something, because the world is moving in that direction."

The following year, my senior year, because of one schedule conflict at the time, I thought I was going to be an artist. I actually wanted to be a political cartoonist. I was drawing political cartoons for the Tulsa High School's jointly published weekly newspaper. You could submit cartoons, and I'd done that for a couple years. Because I needed an art class, because I was an art major—if you're going to college, you were automatically an English major. You had to have four years of—they took the ninth-grade year and applied that to high school in Tulsa in those days. You had to have four years of English, and then you had to have three solid years of something else. I did art and I did history and English. I did two years of Latin. I got all that required stuff out of the way.

But because of the schedule conflict for an art class that I wanted in the afternoon, I didn't have anything in the morning until I discovered Ernest Darling, who was the father of one of my good friends, Doug Darling, and also the chairman of the History Department at Rogers High. Ernest Darling had a class in ancient and medieval history in the first class period. That meant that would be my homeroom. I'd stay there for the first class period and I could organize my schedule the way I wanted it for the rest of the day. I thought, okay. It was a little weird to have—I'd go visit Doug. "Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Darling. How are you?" That was about it. That might be a little uncomfortable, but, oh, well. So, I took the class.

The first day he said he had come back the year before—he'd been on a fellowship at Teacher's College at Columbia University—and he'd picked up some ideas. He wanted to do teaching, especially in history, a little different. What he told us was—this was the first year he was going to try this—on Mondays, he would dictate to us an unfinished outline, based upon some aspect of some aspect of

ancient history, because we did ancient history in the first semester and medieval history in the second semester.

He said, “Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, look around the room.” And he had these tables set up, and he had all sorts of books and things, reference works. He said, “You can use the material that’s here in the room, you could go to the library. You have automatic hall passes to go see what’s in the library. But on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, I want you to take these unfinished outlines and find the holes. Look up the material, and see what you think should go in to finish the outline.”

**McLain:** Wow, a little puzzle.

**Hitchens:** “And then on Friday,” he said, “we’ll discuss. We’ll talk about what you found that should go in to finish these things off.” The first week, right away, I was dissatisfied with what I was able to get by using the materials that were there in his room and down in the library. So the following Monday of week two, he dictated the outline, and it had something to do with Rome. I thought, where can I get more? Ah, the University of Tulsa Library.

My mom came home from work and I said, “Hey, Mom, can I use the car tonight?” She said, “It’s a Monday night. It’s a school night. What for?” I said, “I want to go to the TU Library. I’ve got a project in Mr. Darling’s ancient history, and I want to use the materials there.” And the keys came sailing across the room. [laughter]

So I went out, parked, and went in. I went to the desk and the librarian said, “Can I help you?” I said, “I’m on a project. Where’s your section on Rome?” She said, “Oh, well, you go down there.” They had a spiral staircase metal open stacks that went up into the darkness. “You can go back so many rows and turn on the light, and go up the stairs there. It’s the third landing. Turn to your right and go down to the end.”

So I’m going down, turning on all these lights, and they’re lights inside cages along. They cast interesting shadows and whatnot. So I got up, turned on the light down the catwalk to go to the end. I got down to the end, and I looked up at it. And there, from the floor of the catwalk, as far as I could go—that I could reach if I got up on tiptoes—was all books on Rome. I’m standing there going, whoa, I had no idea.

I just reached up. I looked at one and it said “Rome” on the cover. It was a blue leather binding. I pulled it off, pulled it down, and as I looked down at the top of the volume, there was all this dust on it. So I went “Poof!” and blew the dust off. I was suddenly enveloped in these dust motes that was musty,

library odor. I was surrounded. The light was coming from over behind me to my right, so there were these sort of shafts of dust motes flying around. I opened up the front of the book to see that the last time that book had been checked out of the library was 1928.

I had this feeling that hit me at that moment. Something had happened. I had no idea what it was, but something important had taken place. Years later, I described it as Clio, the Muse of History, came sidling up and stuck her tongue in my ear. [laughter] Because that's when I realized it was a moment unlike anything I'd ever had, except that day that I was looking up at the sky when I was sitting on the back stoop at my aunt's house; the sudden realization that I was stepping into a different reality.

I looked through these things, and suddenly I had seven books stacked up. I had enough room. I could hold my hands down like this and put them under my chin. I thought, well, there's probably enough here. I should be able to get something out of this stuff. So I went waddling down. I was trying to turn lights off with my elbow going down the stairs. Got down to the desk, and this same woman is there. She came up and she looked at me and she said, "Oh, it looks like you found some material." And I said, "Yes, ma'am." And she said, "Okay, let me have your library card and I'll check this out for you."

I didn't have a University of Tulsa library card. I didn't know I needed one. I had a Tulsa Public Library card. I pulled that out and gave it to her. She says, "No, I'm sorry, this is the Public Library. We need a University of Tulsa library card." I said, "I don't have one." She said, "The other thing that I have to tell you is you're only allowed to check out five books at a time. You have seven here." And I'm going "Oh-h-h." She said, "Well, do you want a library card?" I said, "Yes." So I filled out that stuff and handed it to her, and she said, "It'll be ready next week." I said, "What do I do? I've got a project." She said, "This is important to you, isn't it?" I said, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "All right. Between you and me, I could get in a lot of trouble if people found this out. What I'll do is I'll check these books out to you on my card if you promise me—when will you have them back?" I said, "They'll be back next week because I'll have the next step in my project." She said, "You're sure?" I said, "Oh, yes, ma'am." She said, "All right. You can use my card and I'll have your card ready next week when you bring the books back, and we'll go from there." I said, "Oh, thank you."

So I went out, got home, sat down and started. My mother had never seen me do something like this. She knew I read a lot, but there I was stuck into it. I was stuck into it that year. I discovered what it was like to do research. I discovered that there's so much to know in history out there."

**McLain:** This was your junior year in high school?

**Hitchens:** This was my senior year. I'd just turned 17. Before the fall semester was over with, Mr. Darling took me aside one day and he said, "Dave, I don't know how to say this, because you seem so enthusiastic, and I don't want to mess up your enthusiasm. But you've got to give other people an opportunity to get in. Why don't you hang back and let other people start the discussion?" Because I was constantly jumping in, I had to stop.

**McLain:** You were excited.

**Hitchens:** Yeah, and I surprising him. Well, when I finished my master's degree and I headed to Georgia for my doctorate, I stopped off in Tulsa and found out that he was at Rogers High, so I went to see him. I walked in the door, and I ran into Thelma Arnold, who was a chemistry teacher that I had had trouble with when I was a junior. Because I was swimmer, I was something of a jock, and she didn't have a very high opinion of me. I walked in, and there she was, Mrs. Arnold. Oh my god. My first person to see. I'd been away five years, and there she was.

She looked at me and she had a funny little smile, and she said, "Oh, it's Dave Hitchens. Are you home on leave or what?" I said, "No, actually I just finished my master's degree in history at the University of Wyoming, and I'm on my way to start a teaching assistantship for my doctorate at the University of Georgia, and I'm here to see Mr. Darling, thank you very much," and walked off. And she's going "Huh, huh?" And inside I'm going "Yeah, socked it to you." [laughing]

So I went to see him, and he was kind of stunned and tickled, because I was only the second person he'd ever worked with that had gone on. Is that Phil?

**WOMAN:** Phil's here, yeah. However you guys are doing is fine.

**McLain:** I got him off track.

**Hitchens:** He got me started in the wrong direction.

**McLain:** Maybe we're at a good place to take a break today, and I could come back another time? I'd love to come back.

**Hitchens:** Would you?

**McLain:** I would. This would be really wonderful for me. Is that okay with you?

**Hitchens:** You bet. When do you need to have this stuff?

**McLain:** I think I have a bit of time.

**WOMAN:** You're talking about doing the fall magazine and stuff like that?



**McLain:** Right. I know they're still working on the spring one, getting it out the door. I could come back. I actually live very close to here. I could come on the weekend even if that's a better time for you. I don't want to wear you out. And I don't have to just come back one more time either. If this is fruitful, it's great for me. It's really fun.

**WOMAN:** I'm sure I'm going to enjoy the taping because the questions will come from a whole different perspective, and I like that idea.

**Hitchens:** John knows about the Red Cliff reservation folks in Wisconsin.

**McLain:** Been there many time to that area.

**WOMAN:** Wow.

**McLain:** In fact, there's a beautiful little Chippewa cemetery on Madeline Island. I don't go in because I respect it too much, but I often go and peak in from the outside.

**WOMAN:** That's where you got sidetracked a little bit, huh?

**McLain:** We started with his mother. We're moving along. We're into teenaged years now.

**Hitchens:** I told him the library story.

**McLain:** How the Muse of History bit him. Licked him, he said. [laughter] Obviously, I want to ask about Evergreen at some point, the footnote at the end of your life there.

**Hitchens:** Forty-one-year footnote. Anyway, I've been rolling right along.

**McLain:** But I am mindful of your energy and everything.

**Hitchens:** Well, 2:00 or 3:00 in the middle of the afternoon is pretty good most any day. If you're close enough, do we have anything scheduled for tomorrow?

**WOMAN:** I think we should probably check in with them. They've been trying to get in to see you for a week or two.

**McLain:** Tomorrow is a little iffy for me because I've got to go to a meeting in Tacoma at 10:00.

**WOMAN:** Next week opens up again. I'm going to be painting rooms at my house this weekend. I'd love to come over between a coat of paint, if that's not a problem for you.

**WOMAN:** Saturdays are actually pretty good.

**Hitchens:** Usually.

**McLain:** I'll call you. I'll call you Saturday morning.

**WOMAN:** I'm back after 10:00 in the morning because I got do my workout, so call late in the morning. We'll just double check. Sundays, I'm reserving not to have people, just to have a day down. Saturday would be good, or back on a weekday.

**McLain:** Monday is the holiday.

**WOMAN:** One day is the same as the next to us most of the time.