Allen Tough Reflects on Self-Directed Learning

On March 24, 2003, Allen Tough was interviewed in his Toronto home by Robert Donaghy. For details, see the notes at the end of the interview.

Robert Donaghy: Could you please describe the experiences that first led you to get involved with the study of self-directed learning?

Allen Tough: I was doing my PhD in Adult Education at the University of Chicago in the early 1960's and was in a course with Cyril Houle. It covered the steps of program planning in adult education. We were given the assignment to apply those steps to a particular learning situation, such as a group of peers learning something together, or a group with a teacher, and so on. The last option on the list was a self-directed situation, meaning the learner learning something on his or her own. A learner learning alone! I wanted to study that one. I applied the program planning steps to the situation of learner learning alone and found it fit very well. I found that learners did in fact go through all the steps that teachers go through in their planning, but the learners do it for themselves and that's what excited me.

RD: Could you say a little bit more about this learning by themselves?

AT: In most curriculum models, the steps taken by the professional educators include setting the learning goals or objectives, finding resources, choosing the right method and evaluating the progress. It turned out that these steps are exactly what the learners went through. They set their own goals, they figured out how to learn as they went along, they went and got resources, and they evaluated their progress.

This assignment was to have an impact on my future studies. After Houle's course ended, I had to choose a thesis topic. I went through some topics that were dead ends. Fortunately, I decided to come back to this idea of self-directed learning and studied it.

But I didn't know what particular questions to ask about this phenomenon. There wasn't much written about this topic in 1963. Mr. Houle's own book, The Inquiring Mind, was really about people who were eager to take courses rather than people who were eager to learn on their own.

As I didn't know what questions to ask about self-directed learning, I went and simply listened to some people talk about their learning. I asked

fellow students and people I knew in Chicago. I just said, "Tell me about learning something. Tell me your stories." What I noticed was that they all told their story in terms of people, such as "I asked my brother" or "I went to the store and the storekeeper helped me." I interviewed one woman who later became an adult education professor, who learned to play the guitar, and she told the story that way. She went to the music store and the salesperson explained what kind of guitar to buy, gave her booklets telling how to play the guitar, explained how to hold her fingers. So people told their story in terms of other people and how they helped. That's what tipped me off that self-directed learning is not a lonely thing. It's not an isolated thing but a very social thing. It involves a lot of interaction with others even though it sounds like it's an isolated and individual act.

This research experience led to many years of studying self-directed learning. For me, the biggest thrill of all is doing interviews. Listening to people talk about their learning! I got that kick, that fun, that pleasure right from the beginning. It was just fascinating to listen to people talk about their own learning, and there were surprises. One young woman, for example, was learning Spanish. Her motivation was doubled by someone saying she couldn't do it. I never thought that someone saying you cannot do something would actually increase your motivation. There were just all of these fascinating things coming out. Many people do these interviews as a way of becoming a better teacher. I think that teachers listening to their students talk about learning is very valuable. It is also a rich human experience to listen to how people learn.

RD: Could you say more about the interview process, which seems to be something very fascinating to you? Something that perhaps piqued your interest in that area of research?

AT: Something that often impressed me was how competent people were in designing their learning. They do want more help to become even more competent, but people already have a knack for planning their own learning and carry it off successfully. It's one of the fascinating things about this phenomenon. It's a normal thing that we all do, and do very well, but we don't do it with much awareness that we're being learners.

Another aspect of the interviews is that I felt a lot of affection for people. I guess it was because you are listening to a very positive side of people, which is another reason that doing interviews in this area is a very happy and rich experience. You are hearing people talk about dozens of issues that they don't often get a chance to talk about. People don't ask

them at dinner parties or the breakfast table, "What have you been learning these days?" They are talking about something that they're enthusiastic about and something that's a very positive side of them. There is learning, change, growth, trying new things. It touches on the best side of people. I feel a kind of love or affection for almost every person I've interviewed.

RD: The whole idea of listening to people as a way of providing a social connection to others seems to be very powerful for you. Is there anything else that you would like to add about listening to others?

AT: The other thing interviewing uncovers is the sides of people that you don't know about. I interviewed my own father, my own mother, my parents-in-law, and my wife's siblings. In all of those cases, I already knew the person. I was surprised to find that they were learning something that I didn't know they were learning. My own father, for example, was learning how to deal with delinquents in his schools. He was a secondary school superintendent. I knew he'd gone to the United States a couple of times on trips; however, I didn't realize that this was all a part of a learning project of how to deal with potential delinquents in his high schools.

RD: Could you perhaps talk more about your experience with self-directed learning over the years, in any way that you wish.

AT: After I had an initial assignment with it in Mr. Houle's course, I ended up doing a thesis on the help that people get from other people in doing self-directed learning. I found that exciting because Mr. Houle, my major advisor, actually thought it was a very dumb topic. He wondered why you would get help when you're learning something on your own. It simply didn't make sense to him at first. But what I actually found was that people got help from an average of ten or eleven different people with each thing they learned. It was the opposite of what we thought. I think a self-directed learner is actually being more social than occurs in many classroom and more seemingly social kinds of learning. As I have mentioned, self directed learning does not appear to be a private or an individualistic kind of thing.

Later on, I decided to write the book The Adult's Learning Projects, because I was excited about a lot of questions regarding this kind of learning. The Adult's Learning Projects is on the whole range of intentional adult learning. I was fascinated with what people learn, about why they learn, how they go about it, what their problems are, what kind of help they want, and so on. About halfway or a third of the way through writing it, I

realized people weren't going to take this book seriously unless I documented how much of this learning occurs. That's when I decided to do a fairly rigorous interview schedule and train interviewers to study this. The part of my work that's been most recognized is this interview schedule for studying the four kinds of learning projects to document the amount of learning that is self-directed.

We studied the four types by who does the planning, that is who decides the content and methods from one learning episode to the next. The four kinds of learning projects were: groups of learners with a teacher, either paid or a friend, one-to-one with a teacher, peers with no teacher, and individuals learning on their own. We found that seventy per cent of learning was the individual planning their own learning. To use the iceberg analogy, the total iceberg represents adult learning. The highly visible part sticking above the surface is courses and students in classes, but the bulk of adult learning is like the part of the iceberg that is under water. It is invisible and you don't notice it. This huge 'underwater' part represents self-directed learning. It includes for example, the things learned on your job, or learning how to fix something at home. We don't usually think of those as learning.

Nobody until we did so, had studied this phenomenon much beyond perhaps one question in a long interview on some other topic, so I'm glad that we could establish how incredibly pervasive it is. Self-directed learning is part of our lives – even though we often do not recognize it ourselves. Until we spend an hour with an interviewer teasing out that part of our life, we don't see it as learning.

RD: You have mentioned several times a social aspect or relationship with others that are helping with the learning process. Is there anything more that you'd like to say about the social context?

AT: People amaze me at how well they find human resources. It's almost as if we have a computer databank in our heads. We know people at work and in our neighborhood. We have friends and family. And we know their interests, so that when we are travelling to a particular country, for example, we scan the databank in our head and we know who's been in that country, or who used to live there, or who has a friend from there. We just seem have a knack for finding people to help. Or take the example of a mother with a sick child. She remembers somebody else in the neighborhood whose kid had the same problem and goes and asks her for help. But again, it is a normal thing that's part of our life and we don't even think of it as learning. We just do it.

RD: Is there anything else that you would like to add about being sensitive to how your research is perceived and accepted? You mentioned wanting to be very precise in terms of how you pursued the research and completed your book.

AT: People get quite excited about the whole concept of people learning on their own. As I said, I've spoken to a lot of groups and been excited by their enthusiasm, but in the early days there were a couple of audiences I spoke to at adult educators' conferences where some people were very resistant. They didn't want to hear this message.
That stage passed pretty fast fortunately. But at my very first two presentations, people had attacked the methodology which I think was as good as it could be at the time. I think they didn't like the results. They didn't like to think or accept that adult educators were not the center of the universe, that instead the learners actually are the center of the universe and use adult educators for some of their learning. I felt that what they were worried about in their methodology attack was that if I was right, then that's going to make us change. We're going to have to behave differently as adult educators. After those first couple of presentations, the ideas rarely met any kind of resistance.

RD: You mentioned Cyril Houle and that your initial interest came about through a program planning class with him being your major professor. Is there anything else that you want to add about your relationship with him, or your experiences with him as being a person very influential in your life?

AT: He was certainly the right person for me at that time. I guess what I needed was someone who liked conceptual frameworks, and that is exactly what he loved. He had just done a book for which he also listened to learners talk about their learning. He had come out with some fascinating results in this book called <u>The Inquiring Mind.</u> He was very smart and at that time in adult education, he and Roby Kidd were the most famous. They were the only two doing adult education work on the international scene, which I ended up being very attracted to as well. It is difficult for people nowadays to imagine how small the adult education field was in those days. It was basically Houle and Kidd, on the international stage.

It's probably hard nowadays to also realize how new or ground-breaking it was when you first started talking about self-directed learning

and self-planned learning. But at that time, it just wasn't talked about. It wasn't something on people's radar then.

I might also tell you about the process of searching for my dissertation committee. One professor I approached was negative but his colleague across the hall, Philip Jackson, was particularly enthusiastic. The negative professor kept shaking his head and saying, "This just isn't my cup of tea." But Jackson was so excited with this topic. He opened his bottom drawer, pulled out some cards and said, "I've been fascinated by and making notes on this topic for years". So I asked him to be on my thesis committee. My other committee members were very supportive, too. They were Cyril O. Houle and Bruce Joyce. When you're in a brand new field studying a strange topic, it's nice to find people who are excited about it and who join your thesis committee.

RD: Anything else that you want to add about this excitement?

AT: I just find adult learning inherently an exciting thing whether it's in a course or it's self-directed. Self-directed is more of a personal adventure. I certainly have never felt any regret at choosing this topic or this field. It held up well over the years. Regardless of what happens to the field over the years, we were in a noble profession. This is a profession that is doing good, that is important in society and important to individuals.

RD: You've mentioned a couple of times that you didn't know enough when you first had an interest in self-planned activities or self-directed activities. When you were first thinking about your dissertation topic, you lacked a conceptual handle. Is there anything more you want to say about that?

AT: Yes, that is part of the grounded theory approach which was a hot topic in those days. I shuttled back and forth between armchair thinking, conceptualizing, and going out and immersing myself in data. It could be diaries or listening to people, or overhearing people or whatever. And then I'd come back and think some more, and then go back and check it out with the real world again. That is how I gradually got a handle on this phenomenon that I knew I wanted to study but initially had no idea how to do so.

RD: Is there anything else that you would like to add about the phrase 'being a noble profession' mentioned a while back?

AT: I guess it's one of the things I like about adult education, it contributes to society and to the individual and I think self-directed learning is the same. There is a lot of controversy now in the field, with some people saying that self-directed learning is totally selfish. I think it's intricately connected to society. I don't agree with those who say that self-directed learning is somehow different or has nothing to do with society. For example, when we interviewed politicians, we found that they do lots of learning—fortunately. We were pleased to find a connection between social issues and society and individual learning.

RD: Could you say a little bit more about how your thinking on self-direction has evolved over time?

AT: The World Wide Web somehow seems to embody the kind of things that we have always talked about with self-directed learning. So I'm very excited about the World Wide and how it fits into adult learning.

Many years ago I had a student come to me and ask to do an individual reading course. He was not one of my thesis students, so I did a bargain with him. I said, "Okay, David. I'll do that if you will, in return, do a diagram of your learning and give me your diagram". He is the kind of guy who thrives on that kind of thing, so he did it. That is a fascinating diagram, because it shows a lot of paths that branch off and reach dead ends and a lot of paths that go off and then go on to other paths. The whole thing was incredibly chaotic and complex. It was the opposite of linear. There was no linearity about it at all.

I think that's what adult learning is like and it should be. If you are changing, and if you're learning, then obviously your path is going to change as you go along. It's not like you sit down at the beginning and plan the whole thing the way we as educators do. The World Wide Web is the opposite. It is the embodiment of the student's learning path. You can follow your new interest immediately with the hyperlinks, so I just think that the web is a natural foundation for adult learning. Some feel that it has become very commercial and is in danger of in losing some of that emphasis on learning, but I don't think it's ever going to lose it really.

RD: Could you say more about these fascinating paths in terms of this one student that you were working with in the self-directed learning course?

AT: The end point wasn't what he thought it would be when he started. Everything was connecting like a jump across a river into some different

land. As he learned about the first topic, his choice about where to go next changed, which was a good sign. If a learning experience is powerful, you should change your idea about your destination and about your next direction. This is exactly what was happening with him.

RD: Could you say a little bit more about the nonlinearity of the learning experience or the diagram, the fact that it was changing and how powerful it was?

AT: Certainly it impacted on how I operate as a thesis advisor or as an instructor, because it doesn't seem to make sense to plan too far ahead. In some ways, it does make sense to plan far ahead in life, but when it comes to learning and change, it seems to make more sense to try on your next step, with at least some destination in mind, but knowing that you may change your mind or your destination before you get there. So I say to students, I don't want you to give me a plan for where you're going to end up. I want you to give me a plan for what you're going to do next, with some thought to where you're going to end up. And that seems to work.

RD: Could you talk a bit more about your experience with the World Wide Web? You seem to be saying there is a powerful connection with self-directed learning.

AT: Especially in the early days when we were all getting used to the web, I just thought of it as a gigantic library - like you go and walk into a library that has all of the world's information in it. And you didn't even have to go outside your front door to do it! The fact that you can go on to Google or some other search engine and in a minute or two be reading almost any topic you can imagine, boggles my mind.

RD: Could you talk a little bit more about this amazement with speed as it relates to the Internet?

AT: I am amazed by the speed of getting what you want. For adult learners, you often need to explore to get what you want. You have to wait for a book in the library. You have to wait until the library opens. It's midnight and the library doesn't open until ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Of course, with a course it's even worse. You have to wait until next Monday night when the next class is to see your teacher or whatever. We have found in one-on-one discussions that these are the standard barriers that adult educators find in

their learning process: the distance and the time and sometimes the money. All of those things disappear with the web once you have a computer. It doesn't cost you anything or much time.

RD: You were talking about getting what you want, the waiting, being frustrated. Is there anything more you want to say about that?

AT: One thing is what might seem like a paradox at first. Learners on the one hand are very competent, as I mentioned. I'm impressed in the interviews at how well people do. They have never taken a course in education in their life, yet they manage an education process really well. That is, their own education process. At the same time, my sense is that they could benefit from help. My own thesis was on tasks - the teaching tasks we talked about earlier - the task of setting the goals, planning the method, finding the particular resources in that area. With each of those tasks, people said that they would like more help, particularly with setting goals and with finding resources. So, I think adult educators should be thinking about ways to provide that kind of help. We don't want to undercut the confidence that's already there. We don't want to make people feel that they're incompetent or hopeless without our help. At the same time, I think we could help learners retain their power, their sense of confidence and their courage to go ahead and do these things, while being there just to suggest some other ways to set goals, some other possible resources.

I guess I'm disappointed in where this whole field of research has gone in that adult education has not picked up that part of it. I don't see a lot of efforts to help learners set their goals and choose their resources. We should not actually provide the learning for them. Let them do their learning on their own and find their own ways to learn.

I did a little booklet called Expand Your Life, laying out a lot of things that people could learn and that helped them make choices around which of those things they wanted to do - to become more competent at their job, to become better at raising their kids, to learn about the world or about health, and so on. Then we helped them find ways to do that. We used three methods. We did one-to-one counseling. We did the booklet. And we did workshops called "Choosing Your Path for Learning" or "Choosing Your Learning Goals". We interviewed people who had used the booklet and came to workshops. They reported benefits, but for some reason, the field never picked that up, and that's my biggest disappointment.

RD: Anything else that you would like to say about this paradox of the learner being competent versus the good intentions of others trying to facilitate the learning?

AT: There's a danger in educators trying to help out as an educator, taking control of the process. I don't mean that educators should keep their hands off this process totally. I don't take this position, but I would like to see educators recognizing that they're not the center of the process. Rather, it's the learner and the learning that are the center and the educator fits into that as do a lot of other people and a lot of other resources. Many adult educators do make that transition in their own teaching and it is very exciting when they do that. Some never manage to do it.

RD: Is there anything else that you would like to say about the future vision of self-directed learning?

AT: We talked about the web, and there are a few efforts to make people become more confident at the web, but I don't see that as a big movement within adult education.

I would like to see programs or workshops helping people set their learning goals because this is where people have the most trouble. Most adults who we've come across have far more learning goals than they can ever accomplish. They have to choose from among them. There are adult educators who say people are not motivated to learn. I think they are wrong. I think adults are highly motivated to learn. They may not want to learn what *we* want them to learn, but they are motivated to learn what *they* want to learn. However, they have trouble setting priorities among all the different aspects of their life. Whether they're crying out for more competence or their interests are crying out to be explored, it's a time management question in a sense. I think we as educators could be very useful in helping people there. One chooses one or two particular focuses for the next few months, and then we examine and pick some different learning projects for the next few months and so on.

RD: You mentioned making choices and now you mention the issue of time management and setting goals. Is there anything else that you want to say about that?

AT: No, but there is one other thing I want to talk about. It is Malcolm Knowles. I love the guy. We all did. He was a wonderful man, a very special

man. He and his wife were involved in the human growth movement when it first started. He is the only adult educator that I know who also was involved in that. He and I were very much in sync with each other. We were on different paths, but parallel paths. We certainly admired and supported each other on these parallel paths. Malcolm was on a first name basis with everyone and had enormous amounts of energy and outgoing warmth and so on. He attracted an enormous number of students who carry on his work, and in each one of his books he has their accounts of what they did with his many self-directed learning approaches.

RD: Through the course of our dialogue, you have talked about listening to others, the interview process as it related to your learning projects. You have talked about stories and experiences showing that adult learning can be a very happy, rich, and positive human activity. You have talked about your love for the learner, uncovering sides of them that you didn't know at the onset. You have also talked about your relationships with other colleagues in the field and the influence that they had on your work, your research and your life. We have talked quite a bit about the excitement that it had for you. We have talked about change, and the World Wide Web. Is there anything else that you want to add?

AT: Yes, my focus has always been the total range of adult learning. What excites me is the whole range of content and method. I am also excited about self-directed learning not as a thing by itself but as just one of the ways that people learn, and very often we miss that. Some people think that I'm only interested in self-directed learning, or it's somehow different from anything else. It's just one part of the whole picture of adult learning. Adult learning is highly intentional. I think we are wrong if we focus only on self-directed learning and ignore the many other ways in which people learn.

Of course, I don't in any way denigrate learning that's not highly intentional. Some people ask me about that. I often get the question, "What about people who just learn incidentally?" and I say, "Yeah, it's important, too." It's just that you have to choose one thing to study. You can't study everything. I made a choice. It's not that the things I didn't study are not important. I just did what I thought was very fascinating. I'd like to see more study of incidental learning, too.

I mentioned in a speaker phone conversation with Lucy Guglielmino's class a few weeks ago that Harold Huston had studied people who worked in meat cutting plants. People working in the plants seem to just learn how to do the job from the guy beside them. Yet, this guy never teaches them. No

one else teaches them, but if that guy's sick some day, then the first person would take over and do his slice as well as his own slice.

That is incidental learning. That's important learning, and it is good learning. However, it doesn't fit into our model of teaching or even intentional learning. It just happens. A lot of learning is like that. I have my own example. I was driving on the highway one day about twenty-five years ago, in the middle lane of the three westbound lanes. The car in front of me suddenly stopped . I learned from that - allow more room! I didn't plan that learning. Unplanned unintended learning is a very important phenomenon, too. It all should be studied.

RD: Is there anything else that you would like to add about the importance of the group learning process, the learning from peers, learning within a group?

AT: Two of my thesis students studied groups of peers who learn. It just seems very powerful to get together with other people who have the same situation. It really makes sense that the sharing of emotions, the sharing of a bond, and the sharing of practical advice, would be very powerful. I don't know of many studies on this subject.

RD: You also mentioned earlier in our conversation that it was important to know where to go for information, who to call for this, who to call for that. What occurred to me is the powerful connection that exists in some sort of a group format. Is there anything else that you care to bring out regarding this?

AT: I've always liked what happens when you are working with a group and you tell them they can learn on their own. You may find out they went off and learned on their own without you the next day!

We haven't talked about instructors who try to shift toward this kind of learning. It's very rewarding. Of course, it can be rough too. In my first summer of teaching at the University of Toronto, I encouraged some learning on their own and then one day the class decided that they weren't going to meet the next day. I was devastated. They didn't need me. But this is good. This is the way it should be, but it's hard to step out of being in control and needed, and being queen or king of the class.

Another thing that's hard is that the class gets really unruly or noisy. I was trained as a high school teacher and you're supposed to have discipline and control. You have quiet in the classroom. But when people learn what

they want to learn and talk about their own learning, then things start to bubble up and it gets pretty noisy. But eventually you come to realize that this is a good sign, and you're happy about it and find it hard to go back to being a traditional instructor. Sometimes educators do go back when things start to fall apart. But most of us can't go back once we've experienced the joy and excitement and engagement of learners who are learning what they want to learn within a class or course.

But I do hear of instructors trying to make this change and a lot of them go through much pain and worry. They're trying to change and I think the change is in the right direction, but their boss, their colleagues, or their administrators, are giving them a hard time and it's really tough. If you're the only person in the whole college or the whole university or in the whole high school who is doing it, it's really tough. It is much better if you can find a sympathetic colleague to share the experience.

RD: Is there anything else that you want to say about change?

AT: In my career, my next step after studying self-directed learning was to study intentional changes. I wrote a book called Intentional Changes. My interest was partly because I was involved in the human growth movement.

Adult learning projects and intentional changes are two concepts with different starting points. In the former we looked at all learning projects that an individual did in a year and the number of hours spent at them. In Intentional Changes, we looked at the largest and most important change that individuals had made in their lives in the past two years. Examples of such changes were moving to a new home, ending a marriage, taking a new job, starting a new recreational pursuit. These were all changes but they weren't necessarily learning, so it is a different phenomenon. But we found that the two processes were dramatically similar, in that they were largely self-directed and they got help mostly from friends and neighbors rather than professionals. Some people will do it largely on their own. Some of their help is from professionals, but a lot of it's not. So it's interesting and encouraging to find the same patterns and same results, though with a somewhat different focus to start with.

My next personal career change after intentional changes was to future study. That's about change too, but change on the global and societal level. I had been interested in changes in individuals. Future study looks at a broader sphere than the individual, but it's a field that emphasizes that we can as individuals, to some extent, control and plan what happens to society and the world. The intention is a key part of this change.

I've always been interested in how people find meaning in life. I've had a lot of people say to me that most people don't think about this. I think they're wrong. When we were interviewing people for the booklet Expand Your Life, I was surprised to find how people whom I might have thought had routine jobs and led pretty dull and routine lives, would take a few minutes at bedtime to think about what their life is all about. Everybody seems to have some moments when they think about the world, think about their faith, think about the meaning of life, think about whether they're having the sort of life they want. They want to feel they're making a difference and they're contributing, that they're being personally enriched and rewarded, that there's something more to life than material things.

For many years, I taught a graduate course on the future and on different global issues. This topic can be very depressing because most things are getting worse—the environment's getting worse, we're not getting rid of weapons and warfare. Students went through a very emotional roller coaster with that course. One of the students, Martha Rogers, became fascinated by this process. She herself went through the roller coaster experience and during the course, often woke up in the middle of the night, worrying about the world. So for her doctoral thesis, she studied people who went through that course.

Martha Rogers, who is now a professor at York University, has written about it their process. She talked about the head, the heart, and the soul aspects of it. The head is the cognitive change. The heart is emotional change. The soul is the most interesting part but she found it hard to get people to talk about it because we don't have language for it. For some people, the soul aspect was religious faith specifically. Four students had to re-examine their belief in God because if the World is in this bad shape, how could you worship God who created this? They all ended up reaffirming their faith, but they had a bad time while examining it. Probably others asked questions like what can I do with my life, what can I contribute to the world, should I have kids if the world's this bad? There are these deep questions about meaning, about essence, about both God and the universe, and what life is all about.

Martha found it a really hard section of her thesis to write. She didn't even know whether to call it soul. It wasn't just religious although soul to most people has religious connotations. To others it was something different. As a society, we don't talk about this kind of thing.

Finally, I might mention Reg Wickett, who is now a professor at the University of Saskatchewan. His thesis focused on learning projects related to spiritual growth. Initially he thought they would be largely Bible

study and so on. But he was wrong. They were quite different from what he expected. One interviewee went to Nova Scotia to be near the ocean. A couple of people went out to the woods to ski or hike. They wanted to get close to God, close to the universe, close to nature, close to whatever is grand and transcendent, perhaps as a way of getting a context for healing themselves and dealing with a crisis.

Allen Tough was interviewed at the kitchen table in his Toronto home. Cathy Rand was an interested observer. Robert Donaghy, the interviewer, drove from Tennessee. He was working on his Ph.D. thesis on eight scholars noted for their research on self-directed learning. His invaluable thesis is titled "It Permeates the Whole Fabric of Your Life": The Experience of Scholars who Have Studied Self-directed Learning. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2005.

This version of the interview has been edited from the original precise transcription in order to reduce repetition, make it more concise, and remove the inevitable um's and ah's of conversation. Edited by Catherine Rand, Scarlett Wang, Robert Donaghy and Allen Tough.