Oral History Interview with Dr. Terry Spohn

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Interviewee: Dr. Terry Spohn

Interviewer(s): Randy Miller, Dr. Cline Hall

Transcriber: Kaitlynne Showalter

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Notes: Transcript edited by Abigail Sattler

Miller: (0:01) Alright we have a oral history interview today. It's January 8, 2009. This is an oral history interview of Dr. Terry Spohn. My name is Randy Miller. I am one of the two interviewers. Our other interviewer...

Hall: (0:20) Dr. Cline Hall

Miller: (0:23) and lets go ahead and begin. Dr. Hall would you ask Dr. Spohn some questions?

Hall: (0:27) Ok. Welcome Dr. Spohn.

Spohn: Good morning.

Hall: (0:29) Suppose we just start off here. Maybe we can go forward and backward. But I will be interesting to learn how you learned about, Liberty University and Dr. Falwell and what interpicked your interest about coming here.

Spohn: Well I was teaching at Union University in Jackson Tennessee, a Southern Baptist Convention school at the time. And my oldest professional friend in the world was Dr., is Dr. Paul Walter Sattler who's the chairman of the Department of Biology and Chemistry. And at the time he had just come to Liberty University in '85 and during that year he gave me a call and said, "Hey! Would you like to work together again?" We had done all of our graduate work both at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio for our Master's degrees and at Texas Tech University for

our PhDs. I've known him since '72 and we worked extremely well together and, and, I knew him before he was married and, and, watched his family grow up and he the same with mine. And so he gave me a call and said, "Hey! There's a, there's an interesting thing going on here." Well at the time I thought because of our friendship sure I would look into that. And by the end of '86 after working with Dr. Robert Littlejohn, who was the chairman of the Biology, Chemistry Department at the, they arranged for me to come over during Easter. And I enjoyed the Liberty experience very much. I got to meet with President Guillermin and Russ Fitzgerald who was the, the VPAA [Vice President for Academic Affairs] at the time. And, uh, and I was impressed by it, went back, reported to my family. We decided, after praying about it, that this would be a good move for us, a great place to be able to minister in a Christian context. And so we came in August of '87.

Hall: (2:22) How familiar were you with Liberty and Dr. Falwell before this?

Spohn: Not at all! And in fact during that time that I was working with Liberty about coming, we decided to watch the Old Time Gospel Hour on TV and got a sense of what was happening in the church. And also began to take the News and Daily Advanced long distance to get an idea of what was happening in the community. And we much uh...were affirmed in our decision to come to, to... Liberty University and I've not regretted it.

Hall: (2:58) So, what about your background experience, your family, your born into a Christian family?

Spohn: Yes, my mom and dad are Christians. Mom has died and gone to be with the Lord. And my brother, my only other sib, also has gone to be with the Lord. But grew up in a Christian home, dad was career military. And so I was born in Gallipolis, Ohio. 'Course I have no memory of that. Uh, but we moved around every 2 or 3 years so I'm an army brat, and so there's not one place that I considered home as I was growing up. In fact, here is the place where I've lived the longest in my entire life. Prior to being here, the longest I ever lived anywhere was 5 years and usually that was unusual. It was usually 2 or 3 years in one place.

Hall: (3:50) So, you, in this process you lived abroad and other places?

Spohn: Yes, yes went to, went to German schools right after the Second World War. We were there in the, the early to mid 50s. And, I had a great experience there as a kid. I enjoy foreign cultures. I'm not xenophobic at all. And, I loved that experience. I think that's, that's helped me work with people from different backgrounds.

Miller: (4:16) So, so just for the record what is your date of birth then?

Spohn: 2-22-46

Miller: (4:22) Ok [laughter]

Hall: [laughter]

Miller: And um...so was your home a Christian home and, and did you regularly attend church?

Spohn: Yes, yes. But we never stayed long enough in one place that you got used to a particular,

Protestant um... sect.

Miller: (4:41) Sure

Spohn: For example, I went to churches that were Episcopalian, that were Methodist, that were Presbyterian, that were Baptist, depending on what was available in the area.

Miller: (4:53) So would you go to area churches or base chapels and things like that?

Spohn: Base chapels for some of it because in certain places there were no area churches that, that we were, could go and attend and, and hear in English for example. But there was always some sort of base chapel that we could attend if, if it came to that so, so especially when we were overseas it was a base chapel.

Miller: (5:17) Ok. A little bit more as far as your education goes then. You graduated from high school. How did you decided what you wanted to be and where did you go to school for it?

Spohn: I have loved science since I was a little kid, used to get into trouble as a kid. It always amazed me that all you were doing was pushing electrons through a wire and I couldn't understand how it was possible that you could hear differences in voices through a mechanical device. So I took our only phone apart...

Miller: [chuckle]

Spohn: Got worn out over that one. Uh, couldn't sit down for a week cause I couldn't put it back together again at the age of six. But always interested in science and that sort of thing and especially in my high school experiences, loved biology, knew I wanted to do something in that area. And my family's permanent residence, dad and mom were both raised in Jackson, Ohio. That was our permanent residence now matter where we were in the world and so I ended up going to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio for my undergraduate and then for my masters degree as well and biology was the, was the emphasis there.

Miller: (6:22) Ok. And then where did you go on for your PhD?

Spohn: Texas Tech University, both Paul Sattler and I who had met in graduate school. Uh, for the masters, both were accepted there and they, for both of us we each had people there that we were very much interested in working under, so.

Miller: (6:41) Now Liberty is really known for the Creationist view point that God created the world in 6 literal days and then He rested, that the scriptural account is true. Um, now not everyone who grew up even in a Christian home though has come to that conclusion. Were you always a creationist or did you come to that later in life?

Spohn: I was not always a creationist; in fact I was a high priest of evolution. For years I was an evolutionary biologist by training and it wasn't until we had gone to Texas that this really, God uh, hit me upside the head over this issue. Because my wife Kay, and we celebrated this past summer our 40th anniversary together, my wife Kay was always a Christian, had no problem with, with creationism at all, but, but, I did. This was contrary to everything that I'd been taught. Um, and so when Kay was pregnant, that's my wife's name, with our first child, we decided well, this was arrogant on my part, we would go to some local church just to get comfortable with it cause our little guy or girl might have a, a need for this kind of religious crutch. And, and so we began to attend Lubbock Bible Church, which was pastured by Charlie Clough, strong creationist. And he was teaching Genesis verse by verse when we stepped into that church and I would listen to that and go home and rant and rave to Kay for hours, but we kept going back. And one day I challenged Charlie, I asked him out for lunch and he agreed. I said you know Charlie, everything your teaching is contrary to what I've been taught. And he asked me, he says

"Well Terry are you committed to the scientific method?" I said most assuredly. And, and the law of rationality of course, which basically states that conclusions should be based on adequate evidence. And we began with archeology and then it was zoology and we were together 5 years and in the second year that we were together, studying together, I was convinced that there was a God and I needed to bow down. And I became a Christian living for the Lord during that period of time that I was in my doctoral work. And Charlie was unique in being able to reach me because he was an MIT graduate in science before he was called to pastoring. And so God led me to Texas to bring him to himself. And Texas is always special in my heart because that's where I first started living for the Lord. That's where I got my doctorate. That's where I had my first real job and that's where we had 2 of our 3 children. So that was a very special time in my life.

Miller: (9:27) Well, it sound like, it sounds like God just really worked out all of the details there.

Spohn: Absolutely!

Miller: That he was going through Genesis at the time, that, that was his background and um...

Spohn: Remarkable! I came just millimeters away from, from being lost forever and God brought me to that place and brought me to himself and that was, that was a tremendous, tremendous time in my life.

Hall: (9:50) That's an interesting testimony. Do, why...what, when you were hired here, what was actually your responsibilities? Was it in the creationism area?

Spohn: No

Hall: (10:00) or biology in general or...

Spohn: Just biology. I had taught a number of different courses in the other institutions that I had been parted to. Right after graduating at Texas Tech I stayed on for a year as a, as a distinguished visiting lecturer and taught biology of man, junior level. Looked at man and man's influence in, on the environment, and also taught and was responsible for the undergraduate non-majors, laboratories, etc. And then, went to the University of South Carolina for five years and I taught

biology there, a couple of different courses. And got involved in the, in the the creationist movement after the Texas experience and was involved in a NBCTV debate locally and was an expert witness in the Louisiana trial which went to the Supreme Court of the United States. I was involved in that for 2 and ½ years. Lost my job over it at at the University of South Carolina, then went to Union University and of course that's when Paul ended up contacting me during my time there and came to Liberty. But my initial duties were just to teach biology but I knew by virtue of listening to Dr. Falwell and The Old Time Gospel Hour and looking at Liberty's statements that this was a place where I could thrive in terms of my creationist beliefs and, and teaching the biology, bringing up the, the scientific evidences for a creator God and, and being able to pursue that freely in the classroom. So that was important to me.

Hall: (11:33) Now, when you arrived here there were creationism, there was a class already being taught and when did the museum come in? Is that something later or...

Spohn: No the museum was, was already in place there. Jim Hall and Lane Lester were responsible in that in that area, for I was aware of it, got to meet Lane and Jim but was not directly involved in that until after I had gotten back from speaking to the Russian Academy of Sciences on Creation, in 1994. And came back and found that because of the situation at Liberty and there had to be a number of people let go. We were under um, some scrutiny by SACS [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools], we had some issues we had to overcome there and so Lane and Jim were both let go. Uh, there was... an idea that perhaps we would do away with the museum and everything else with it that when I got back in, in the summer from Moscow, I went to President Guillermin and said that look we need to keep this course. This is a Liberty distinctive; there are a number of things in the museum that are not ours, they're on permanent loan but they're not ours and we need to maintain this as much as we can and I volunteered to teach it for free, just added on to be able to maintain this. And so from around 1994 to 2003 I was the director of Creation Studies and we maintained the creation course and that's when I actually got involved. Of course I was part of the creation movement and Dwayne Gish and Henry Morris and these individuals were friends of mine that went back into the 70s as a result of the conversion I had in Texas.

Hall: (13:19) Let's follow up here on the museum. Uh, 'course its no longer in existence. What is the status of things that we were in the museum and what's the future about that?

Spohn: Well, we are, we are hopeful. We had to give up that space because SACS required at Liberty grew that we needed to have contiguous space with the current library that was to be expanded to meet the, the student need. And so as team players we gave up that space in order to meet that SACS requirement Uh, we have stored many things currently. We have a few small displays set up in the science hall area but we are hopeful to get a space at some point, be able to pull those things out of storage and have an ongoing presences because literally we had thousands of classes of students from elementary schools and higher to come into and visit that museum and we could give a creation perspective, a God honoring perspective on the items that we have there. So we definitely want to pursue that and, and make that a... an item that would attract people from all over the country to come and visit.

Miller: (14:31) So are there any definite plans at this point for a space allocation or...

Spohn: Not at this point. Uh, course Dr. David DeWitt who I mentored for a number of years and made him the director a few years back is overseeing all that and he is pushing for that at every opportunity so we're hopeful that at some point we can get some space.

Miller: (14:50) Now speaking of creation museums, have you ever had the opportunity to go up there to the one up there in Kentucky, the Answers in Genesis one?

Spohn: I have not yet. But David has, David DeWitt and a number of other of our people have gone there, are very impressed by what they see there. Of course Ken Ham is a big friend of this ministry, David and I have had lunch with him. I'm very much aware of what Answers in Genesis is doing in that regard and we're, we're full, full boar behind them in that effort.

Miller: (15:20) Looking at the broad picture of just creationism in general, and 2008, the year that just past, they had the film, *Expelled*. Talking about how at some universities, and, and I'm thinking of Baylor University that was started as a Baptist University, and a faculty member disciplined for just believing in Intelligent Design. Could you talk at the broad level here for just a bit about, right now in 2009, where the whole creationism movement, intelligent design vs. atheism how all of that is and where Liberty has a part in that movement?

Spohn: I think it's robust and its growing. We are able to challenge a lot of the atheistic evolutionary concepts. We are finding some interesting things occurring in that many of the

evolutionists are not willing to debate us. I think they're less concerned about the evidence for it than they are just preserving the paradigm. And so there's a lot more ability for creationists like A.I.G. (Answers in Genesis), like I.C.R. (the Institute for Creation Research) to get the word out. They have websites, they are publishing books, we are expounding it in Universities, David DeWitt has recently published a book that's being used in a number of other places, other than Liberty right now and so we're, we're excited about the opportunities to get the word out and to be an alternative to a naturalistic atheistic explanation for the world so I, I'm excited about the future there.

Miller: (17:00) Now, in the evangelical world it seems as though there is some desire to try to reconcile the two different viewpoints with the intelligent design movement. Not, not literal Biblical creationism but well yes there had to be a designer. How do you feel about Intelligent Design and what is Liberty's position on that.

Spohn: I, I personally don't like it because it allows you to maintain an evolutionary explanation. So for example, Oh yes! Intelligent Design we were seeded here by Klingons who have completed more of their evolution previously than we did. So, so how did human beings get here? Oh we were seeded here by another race. So unless you're identifying who the designer is, its simply a compromise that allows individuals on both sides to maintain their, their current belief system. And, and to my mind only the God man Jesus Christ created everything that was made and I am not willing to budge on that point. So Intelligent Design is often been used as a ramp to, to, to institute to dialogue with the other camp but ultimately it leads nowhere. And so, I applaud individuals who are trying to do that, but to my mind unless you're identifying the creator, you're still going to have the same sort of difficulty.

Miller: (18:23) So what safeguards are in place here at Liberty that would prevent us from being some of these institutions that have either gone from being creationists to merely Intelligent Design? Or have even taken the further step that we even reject Intelligent Design and we're just, we wanted to be accepted in the main stream and so we don't even talk about creationism, we just teach straight up evolution?

Spohn: That will always be a possibility I think. We have seen a huge degree of secularization of our country. They've thrown God out of the public forum and se we're constantly going to have

Our department is strongly creationist. Um, men like Ergun Caner in the seminary and Elmer Towns, etc...they support what we're doing and so in terms of the administrative support and the ability to attract students who still come to Liberty because of that stance, I think we're gonna be alright. But in terms of the future, I'm not a prophet and of course I'll, I'll wager that if you would have talked to the ordained pastors at, at Harvard and Princeton at one point, they would have said no we're never backing off this and yet they have moved away from it. So, hopefully, in light of what I'm seeing right now, I'm comfortable and confidant in where we are.

Miller: (19:55) For the historical record, can you tell us a little bit about what happened with SACS, it seemed as though evolution or creationism had a part with the accreditation in the early '90s.

Spohn: Um, that, that was actually resolved before that point in time. I think we fought a battle earlier before I got here, over that issue. We did have to teach creationism separate from the science courses which is all well and good because if you're going to teach biblical creation then you need to be able to talk about the Word of God and the Bible. If your just going to teach scientific creation then you only involve the scientific evidence that supports the idea of a supernatural creator, and, and so there's some difference there. Our problem with SACS was multiple, we had something over a hundred recommendations against us and its my understanding that when this was presented down at New Orleans at the meeting, we were nearly laughed out of, of the building because no institution had, had that many recommendations against them. On the other hand, a year later, after we had resolved all these issues, we go a standing ovation because no institution had ever recovered for such a thing. And to my mind that was the grace of God working to the individuals that were there to look at and be willing to adapt and change and meet those requirements. And so I've always been excited about our resiliency in figuring out what we need to do before God, uh, to meet the requirements of man, and yet be able to teach and profess what we believe.

Miller: (21:29) And just recently we were, we were reaffirmed by SACS and,

Spohn: yes sir

Miller: (21:32) and, now we're in very good standing there.

Hall: (21:34) Uh...I believe Dr. Terry Weaver was up in the middle of that controversy. Do you know was that, is that...

Spohn: That was before my time, yes.

Hall: (21:42) Do you know anything about his struggles with the SACS, State Department of Education?

Spohn: I, only that it was resolved.

Hall: [laughter]

Spohn: [laughter] but that was before my time.

Hall: (21:53) There's, a fossil, or something, an artifact, was sent off to be dated. Can you tell us about that or what was the result of that?

Spohn: Only, as a...in a secondary, ...only secondarily. I wasn't there at the time but we had unearthed a fossil from out West. We, this fossil was supposed to be tens of millions of years old and uh, yet we found Carbon 14 in it. Now if Carbon 14 has a half life of only 5,000 plus years and so if that, if that fossil was greater than 50,000 years old there wouldn't have been any Carbon 14 in it. So we sent it off, out West, to a radiometric dating institution. We didn't tell them where the fossil fragment came from. They dated it and said it was less than 10,000 years old. After we revealed that it was supposedly from a dinosaur, that it had been extinct for tens of millions of years, they wanted the sample back again, and of course we didn't bother to send it and we then discovered that they decided to change the rules now on accepting dating samples. They want to know how old you think it is and they want to know where the sample comes from. Well if this isn't an objective testing mechanism, why would they need to know that? And the answer is in these radiometric dating processes, there's a slop factor of a billion years. And so you can make it any date you want to make it based on what you believe about that fossil. And so we're not overly impressed with those mechanisms, but when we did send them the sample, they came back and said, it's less than 10,000 years old which fits nicely with what we believe.

Miller: (23:54) Looking back in the history there, we're trying to establish this oral history with some of the one's who were here in earlier days of Liberty. Can you tell us just about the

physical facilities when you got here? This was a very growing campus and so just kind of some of those memories of those early days of what was it like to come to the science labs when they were in their very early stages?

Spohn: Well that, that was very interesting because having been at-large institutions which have money, I had a state of the art laboratory when I was at the University of South Carolina and then at Texas Tech and so forth. So coming to Liberty was a bit of a difference. Um, back then, Demoss Hall was one floor and they were constantly changing the location of the walls in it [chuckle] to meet needs. We did have some labs. They were not SMART labs like they are now. We didn't have the degree of equipment support that we have now and in some of those early years we were so strapped for money that I would have to order cultures of my own, protozoan cultures for example that only costs about \$6.70 back then, but I had to go and pay for them myself because we didn't have the money to do it. And so we made do with what we had and by the grace of God we could stretch what equipment we had to give a relevant experience although perhaps not the best experience back then. Um, but I don't mind that. I, I am for underdogs and I don't mind being one and so we have seen tremendous change in Liberty and God has honored our desires and requests and now we have all SMART classrooms and laboratories and we have some excellent equipment out there and are going to be getting even more. So...I was not put off by those early years when we had to struggle and have been blessed by God to see us move beyond those years into a time where we can, we can provide a relevant experience that can, can meet or beat what they're getting, what students could get anywhere else.

Hall: (26:03) How would you evaluate the labs that we have now in comparison to other institutions?

Spohn: Excellent! And in fact we offer some things that are relatively rare at the undergraduate level now. For example, our kids work with cadavers and to have a cadaver lab, in fact we're only operating using two cadavers at this point, but we have to laboratories each of which can house six and we will, we will build to that end so that we can train our pre-meds and our, our students to have an experience using human bodies and learning the body that way. This gives a huge jump for kids headed for medical school who for example in their first year are going to have gross anatomy, in either sense of that word, and, be able to have had the experience before they actually get into the medical school. So this is, this is tremendous.

Miller: (26:55) Now are we doing any research here at Liberty?

Spohn: Yes we are and we're going to be doing more and more as time passes. We are primarily a teaching institution but we have hired and have labs to support those hires in terms of doing research so we have ongoing research. David DeWitt is an Alzheimer's researcher, Daniel Howe has worked with multiple-sclerosis in some of those areas, we have salamander research going on, a number of organism projects going on I think that will expand in the future.

Miller: (27:32) If you take the typical high school student that we're getting at the undergraduate level, have you seen a change or a difference in the past years that you've been here from how they're prepared, what they believe with the creationist view point, what we're getting from the churches and from the high schools, how has that changed through the years?

Spohn: Many of them are still very weak in that regard. And that's part of a power of a place like Liberty University. We can focus and crystallize those things. Through what they're getting, through their sciences, through what they're getting through the creation course, the apologetics course, this will allow them to reevaluate where they're coming from and what evidences there are so that not only can they be solid in their own belief system but they can go out and profess it and, and actually do a rational defense of the faith unlike what they may have experienced before. In the creation course for example, they do a pre-assessment and a post assessment after that course is done and we are affecting world view tremendously by that course. And so through all the other efforts that are going on and the strong belief system we have here at Liberty, and through that course in particular, we are affecting and strengthening these young people that are coming to us. I am simply not impressed with public education at any level and I am afraid that many of those public schools are simply babysitting services and the kids are coming in less prepared than we've seen in the past. That's ok because we take them where they are and we can bring them to the point where they can go on to whatever the next level is for them so if that's a graduate program, if that's a professional school of some sort, talking just about the sciences now, we can get them to a place where they can perform and compete with anyone.

Hall: (29:39) Let's talk about curriculum a little bit. Um, most all of our students of course, no don't matter what their major, is required to take one science course...

Spohn: mmhhhm

Hall: (29:45) I believe that's true

Spohn: Yes, that's true.

Hall: (29:48) Uh, recently some of the majors have dropped the lab from the science course and this general ed., uh, are you in agreement with that or what do you think of..., is that a good thing or a bad thing? [*chuckle*]

Spohn: No, I am old school. I, I think its one thing to talk about concepts in a lecture setting. Its another thing to go in the lab and get your hands dirty...

Hall: (30:10) mmhhhm

Spohn: and to demonstrate some of these things. So I am definitely a pro-lab. Now if you look across the country, secular schools, private, public, religious schools whatever, the move is to reduce that lab requirement. So even in schools like Ohio State University, a lot of their undergraduate students who have a general science requirement take a non-laboratory class to get that done. Um, I like to be relational with the students and I like to put feet on those concepts to give them experience in a laboratory, give them a skill set that, that they can use to make that more real to them. And my primary teaching now is in human biology, the anatomy and physiology area, so when I teach my undergraduate, non-major course in this area, what I want to try to do with those kids is give them a skill set. How do you know when its time to go to the doctor? How do you use a stethoscope? What is normal heart sounds? What are normal lung sounds? What are abnormal ones? And I can give them websites that they can go far after they've left Liberty and give them an idea of what to put in a home medical kit so that they can know working with their mate, their children, when is it time to go to the doctor? How do you know? What do you look for? What are the basic things there? And so we talk about those things and I can give them those skill sets in the laboratory setting. And so that's what I try to do and frankly, I like to be relational with my students. One of the most disappointing things about these expanded, large classes is that I can't be as relational with them as I could in a much smaller class where I could get to know everybody individually. But in the laboratory setting where I control those numbers, I can get to know over a hundred students pretty well over a semester by dividing those up and having basically 24 or 25 in each lab. Uh, so I'm excited about that part of it but I'm not happy with the loss of the lab requirement.

Hall: (32:15) What about our science graduates? Are they pretty successful in getting graduate school and particularly if they come out of a creationist background?

Spohn: We know that, that can be an issue in some places and many places its not, but we know that, that can be an issues and so we give our kids the very best training that we can give them. Well, our kids when they leave here and go into a graduate school setting or go into a medical school setting, they are very comfortable in the laboratory, they've done it all hands on. They haven't done, been exposed just to simply demonstrations on how this stuff works. They can do it. And, a number of our kids have gone on to be very, very successful both in professional schools, like, medical schools, dental schools, pharmacy schools, etc...but also in straight graduate programs. We just moved in Dr. Gary Issacs, who was one of my best students here at Liberty. He completed his, completed his doctorate at Cornell and wants to come back and be a part of what we're doing here. We've had several of our formal students, go out and get their doctorate degrees and then come back and be a part of this ministry and train other young people to go and do what they do.

Hall: (33:30) Give us some specific examples of some students that have been what you might say successful in the sciences after graduate school among our graduates.

Spohn: Oh sure! Gary Issacs of course, Tim Brophy, uh, Marty Offield. All of these young men have gone out, got their PhDs, come back to Liberty. A number of other one's have gone on to do other things in other schools and not, not come back to Liberty per say, but one of the most outstanding medical doctors that we've ever produced who won an eagle award, the highest alumni award you can get here at Liberty, is Dr. John Bennett, who again was one of my very best students here at Liberty, went out, went to medical school, he went to the Medical College of Georgia. When he went there he was concerned a little bit about his laboratory skills so he went in early in the summer to get exposure to the gross anatomy and that kind of thing. He did so well they made him the instructor for his own freshman class and after John graduated in the 178 year history of the Medical College of Georgia, they had never given an award to their best graduate. They created that award for John Bennett and in that award they said that in this one individual, they saw the highest degree of training and ability to be a doctor and to meet patient needs far beyond anything they'd ever seen before. That was a Liberty graduate and the year that

he went in, they accepted two kids out of state to that program. John Bennett was one of them. The other one was Philip Hopp, also a Liberty graduate.

Hall: (35:17) What about in industry of organizations, other than education?

Spohn: Um...I'm sure there are, although my primary role, I'm the pre-med advisor and so the only ones I hear, hear about are the ones that go in through the professional schools primarily and of course the kids that come back that want to teach biology with us. But Dr. Paul Sattler could probably give you a number of individuals in those areas.

Miller: (35:46) Now its exciting to hear about some Liberty graduates and some former students that are doing well and have done well. Have you seen any evidence of discrimination against our students because of their creationist beliefs?

Spohn: Um...not directly. Indirectly I hear from students that have some difficulty. Um...they are questioned "O you come from Dr. Falwell's school", this kind of thing and they are somewhat quizzical about the competence of our students. That, often times, is quickly dispelled once they see them working in the classroom or the laboratory

Miller: (36:31) I was excited to hear you talk about just some of the very practical things for undergraduate basic biology course. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the areas that we delve into with science? One thing that I think some people might think of, if they're not really thinking about it is that all that you teach here at Liberty is creationism and that's what the whole science department is. I don't know if you ever get that question posed to you but you know tell us a little bit about the department in general and some of the things the students are studying.

Spohn: Well we have over 22 members of our department and we're involved in every area that you can imagine. So we teach not only general biology, not only anatomy and physiology, but we teach micro-biology, we teach genetics, we teach parasitology, we teach environmental sciences courses and ecology and so forth. We do the whole gamut, botany, zoology, you name it. So a student can come here and get a, an experience that will then help them decide where it is that God's calling them to go and work. And so we send kids who are interested in zoology or interested in some other aspect of the biological area, even microbiology for example and they can get that experience here at Liberty and actually be involved in some undergraduate research

projects. We've got projects going on in all these different areas based on the expertise that we have available in the department. So we are a diverse department and we have individuals who are very well trained, who are teachers but are also researchers and can help students get experience personally in undergraduate research and give them the taste in that particular area of science they need in order to decide, you know what? That's what I want to go and do. And we can prepare them and get them ready for that. So we're, we're not simply teaching creationism, we are giving these kids the foundation to be successful in any area of biology and chemistry.

Miller: (38:40) So biology and chemistry...

Spohn: Correct.

Miller: (38:42) there, there are other sciences then that we don't do?

Spohn: Right, some, because some are not in our department. For example we do physics but that's not in the biology, chemistry department, that's in the math area. Uh, physical science, some of those, astronomy, that kind of thing is in other departments. So we have other sciences but they're not taught in our particular department.

Miller: (39:06) Ok. Um...You were involved with a study up at the Peaks of Otter with salamanders.

Spohn: [chuckle] still on-going. Ok I'm not directly involved in that anymore. But at the time, we were working with the, and still are working with the U.S. Forest Service, Dr. Don Kurt is the current Federal Scientist that we work with in that area. The Peaks of Otter salamander is found nowhere else other than the Peaks of Otter and the U.S. Forest Service was interested in, in maintaining that species without destroying that species and so they were looking at different ways to cut timber. And so we set up some plots with them and did some studies, the difference between select cut and clear cut, that kind of thing. And we looked at the impact on that particular species that unique to this place, only place that it's found in the world is right up in the Peaks of Otter.

Miller: (40:03) And for people that might not be familiar with the Lynchburg area geography, the Peaks of Otter are two different mountains. There's sharp top and flat top.

Spohn: Correct

Miller: (40:13) And, so there are some local mountains here in our area...

Spohn: Correct

Miller: (40:16) in the piedmont area of the Appalachians.

Spohn: That's correct and we have an ongoing involvement with the U.S. Forest Service there. We were able to do a study and show them that they can select cut without impacting that species. And so we were able to alter how they cut timber in this particular location. And we've written at least three publications, research publications, on the Peaks of Otter Salamander and have an ongoing presence there. Currently, Dr. Norm Reichenbach and Dr. Tim Brophy are the two individuals most directly involved in that ongoing project.

Hall: (40:56) Tell us about your experiences overall, I believe teaching in the Russian Academy and also in Korea.

Spohn: Well I didn't teach in the Russian Academy but I was invited there in 1994 to talk about Creation/Evolution issues and there was an international symposium there and myself and a number of others. Eleven other individuals were invited and we made presentations to them. What got me to the Russian Academy was something that happened in 1993. The Korean's were hosting Expo '93 in Taejon, South Korea, and the creationists in Korea wanted to have a presence that challenged that evolutionary theme for that expo and so they invited me over to be part of a ribbon cutting ceremony and to present and to present a paper on creationism to the Korean Advanced Institute for Science and Technology which is like a city of 2000 PhDs. And while I was there, the Russian creationists liked what I did so well, they invited me to Moscow in '94 so I made a presentation there. Well in '95, I ended up going to Korea to help my host during the time I was in Korea in 1993, start a Christian University there. I hadn't been home a week before Dr. Kim in the seminary called me and told me my host from my experience in 1993 was coming to campus on a Thursday. They were meeting with, he and some others were meeting with Dr. Falwell and President Guillermin at that time and meeting on Thursday and meeting with the Korean students at Liberty on Thursday evening. He wanted to know if I could meet with him at his hotel for breakfast Friday morning. I thought, well that's great! Sure, I was

excited that he remembered me and went to that meeting Friday morning. Well it wasn't just Dr. Kim Yung Gil, who was my host in '93, it was also the President of the Korean Creation Research Study Group and he's Korea's most celebrated scientist. He has something like 47 patents, he got his PhD from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, he's worked with NASA, he's worked with groups worldwide. He's a brilliant man and a wonderful Christian. And I met with him Friday morning and he and three of his other people gave me these little business cards and on Dr. Kim Yung Gil's business card was his name and he was identified as President of Hong Dong University and I said "well why didn't you tell me in '93 that you were the President of a university?". He said, "we haven't started it yet. I want you to come and help me start this in 1995". This was the summer of '94 and I said, "well I can't do that, I've signed a contract. I have to talk to Dr. Guillermin, I have to talk to Dr. Falwell'. He said "Oh I did that yesterday".

Miller/Hall: (43:55) [chuckle]

Spohn: And so long story short, the family and I pack up, we go to Korea. I help write the curriculum, I'm teaching English as a second language, I'm involved in preaching, special music, I am touting this new Christian University and every media outlet in Korea, their version of CNN, print media, television, radio, that kind of thing, travel around the country. And I was the, myself and my wife were the first natural English speakers that were part of that University. We started with 400 students and a little over 30 faculty members. We had our 10th year anniversary in 2005. Over 3500 students, over 140 faculty members and the only American style Law School in all of Asia and it's a strong Christian presence. The President of South Korea liked that model of higher education so well, they converted their Military Academy to the Hong Dong model. So here is evidence that a Christian presence can change how a country views education and it can have a significant impact in a relatively short amount of time. I'm very excited!

Miller: (45:13) I can tell just by looking in your eyes that you're very excited, very passionate about this.

Spohn: Very much so. This is my kind of extension to Dr. Falwell's vision. We are an evangelical institution. We want to get out the claims of Christ. We want to train young people to go out in every calling that we can possibly manage a major for to go out and influence areas that

we as single individuals cannot have an influence but if we train a pot load of young champions, we can get them out there and have an impact on the culture and that's living that out now in South Korea and I'm excited about it.

Miller: (45:51) Great. Tell us about your time as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Spohn: Couldn't have been the dean at a worse time [laughter]

Miller/Hall: (45:58) [laughter]

Spohn: This was during the time we were having the difficulty with SACS. I came, I got back from Korea and was punished my being made dean.

Miller: (45:07) [*chuckle*]

Spohn: And so from 1996 to 2000, I was Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. We were going through a very rough time. I was putting in 100 hour weeks, we were gathering the data for the SACS recommendations that we had to show and support what we were doing and how we were doing it and what changes we would make. So it was a very intense time, but, it was a great time. I love faculty members. I think that during the time that I was Dean of that particular college which is the largest, most diverse unit on the campus that was an exciting time for me. I got to meet people and get to know other departments. Cline [Hall]was the chairman of the History Department at that time. I got to know him and his faculty better than I ever would have just simply being a biology faculty member. And so that was exciting for me to learn and see what wound the watches of other people in terms of the Liberty University ministry and get a good slice of life at Liberty University. So it was a hard time. We were going through all that SACS material, but personally, for me personally, it was an exciting time because I got to meet people and see God working in the lives of others that not only supported my faith but gave me the drive to that "let's get er done" let's keep on doing what we're doing here. It's a worth while thing and God is active in the lives of our departments and other individuals.

Hall: (47:42) Do you care to mention anything about the relationship among the deans at that time particularly in relationship to the higher up line of the administration?

Spohn: Well we were united in one sense because we were all working under the same difficulty. We had a SACS mandate to either get this right or we risk going down the tubes corporately. And so there was a move among the deans. Okay, lets do what we can do, and so my relationships with those deans was great. It gave me some inside being a brand new dean and you know some of these guys had been doing it for 17 years or more and so they were a great source for me to uh, ok how do you go about getting this done? What perspective should I have on that? And Boyd Rist was my mentor. He was the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. When he was promoted to Vice President of Academic Affairs, I was then made Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and worked right out of Boyd's office for months in order to get a handle on what the arts and sciences was all about. So in terms of the deans there and especially Boyd Rist, I think I was uniquely blessed because we were united by the problem that we faced, which was external, and we were able to work together effectively to get that done. And some of those individuals, although I'm not a dean anymore, my problem with the deanship was it eventually took me out of the classroom and it's the kids where the action really is. I mean the administration part is fine, but the action is where these young people are. And so my last two years of dean I wasn't teaching at all and that was killing me.

Hall: (49:25) Was that one of the main reasons you made your step down from dean?

Spohn: Absolutely! You know I got to looking at, I had drifted from my first calling and I missed the classroom more than I thought I would. And so that was a, when I made that indication to Dr. Rist and others, Dr. Borek and Dr. Rist both tried to talk me out of it. But no, I needed to be back in the classroom and I think that's where I'm most effective. So God allowed me to see things that I ordinarily wouldn't get to see operating at a university and I cherished that experience but also it crystallized where I really needed to be in terms of my involvement at Liberty University and that's in the classroom and in the laboratory.

Hall: (50:15) During the early, well mid '90s the institution went into a great financial crisis. Uh...how did that affect you or the department which you were in?

Spohn: Well, we, it affected us a lot because we had to reorganize a lot of our majors, contents, and what we could offer. We suffered to the point that many times we had to bring in our own paper products because we were hurting so bad financially. And I can remember talking with Dr.

Barb Boothe who was the registrar at that time and neither one of us could figure out, other than a miracle from God, how we even opened the doors in 1990 because of our financial dilemma. I think in talking with administrators during that period of time, many times we had no idea if we were going to make pay roll every two weeks and many times it was a last minute thing that they would have a donor or someone submit some chunk of money or a bunch of smaller amounts from some individuals and we were able to make pay roll that particular two week period.

Miller: (51:21) Do you ever remember a time when they missed a check?

Spohn: Yes...

Hall: Yes [simultaneously]

Spohn: there were two times in the summer when we didn't get paid. But all things considered, that's still a remarkable thing when you have to bring in your own paper products.

Hall: [laugher]

Miller: (51:36) Now I don't know if we have it down for the record. What year did you actually come here, to Liberty then?

Spohn: 1987

Miller: (51:41) Ok.

Spohn: I'm working on my 22nd year here at Liberty, best place I ever worked.

Hall: (51:46) and the dean from '96...

Spohn: '96 to 2000

Hall: (51:51) 2000

Miller: (51:53) Now what would you say then is the greatest legacy, if you were to be remembered for just one thing? You talked about the deanship and you liked that it seemed but you like to be back in the classroom, there was this Korean school. If there was just one thing we were going to remember Terry Spohn for what do you think that would be?

Spohn: I would want to be remembered as a Christian educator, that in my classrooms you were encouraged, that you were strengthened in your faith as well as your knowledge. So I often tell the kids I'm a Biologian. I'm a biologist and I teach and revere and honor and praise God through the general revelation we find through his creation but also as a believer I'm responsible for properly expositing the Word of God through His special revelation and so I have those two, areas that I'm responsible for and in my classes you have two books that are required. One is the science textbook and the other is the Bible and when I'm teaching about the human body there are many physical principals in how the body works that reflect spiritual principals when God in His word talks about the Body of Christ and I try to teach both of those things so that one supports the other.

Hall: (53:24) How is technology actually changed the teaching of science?

Spohn: I love technology. [laughter] And this has been a great boon to me to be able to have SMART classrooms and SMART laboratories where I can bring in things from the web. For instances, when I'm teaching the cardiovascular system and we're working with stethoscopes, I bring in heart sounds and lung sounds from UCLA Medical School over the speaker system in the laboratory and these kids can see oscilloscope tracings and hear the sounds and I can show them, we'll see this is what a prolapsed valve sounds like, this is what a pneumonia sounds like, and these kids can actually hear it. So because of the internet, because of the computerization that I have, I bring in radio graphs into my non-major classes so these kids can see different kinds of fractures, that I can bring right into the classroom, lecture and laboratory and some of that I've gotten by virtue of our students going to medical school. One young man came back and he's a radiologist and he said what can I do for you? And I said I want all the radio graphs, can you email these to me? And I use them in a PowerPoint so I can show these kids you know, what a blocked colon is like, what a, a compound fracture is like, what a comminuted fracture is like. And so that's been a tremendous value to bring in things we don't have here at Liberty but is available that we can call in from external sources and make that available to our youngins.

Miller: (55:10) Let me just mention what a SMART classroom is. SMART is the name of, the brand name of some software but we have these stands in each classroom then with a video projector, the faculty can plug their laptop in...

Spohn: Correct.

Miller: (55:24) and there are speakers in the room. They also have the capability of playing DVDs or VHS tapes. And by the time someone listens to this in the future, probably VHS will have gone the way of other things like beta tapes and record players and that. But there also is a high speed internet connection and all of this is integrated together. The faculty member can then, and you can even mark right on a little table screen type thing...

Spohn: Correct

Miller: (55:49) that you can highlight things and that. So that's what a SMART classroom is.

Spohn: Absolutely! And I love it. I just flat out love that. Of course being a scientist I like equipment anyway and so anything that's electronic is good.

Hall: (56:07) Uh, there are a good many speakers, special speakers for instance come on campus over the years. Uh, any particular one stand out for you, especially in the field of science?

Spohn: Well, umm...Ken Ham because of his creationist involvement. When we've had him come on campus, I think he does it better than anybody in the world. That's been especially exciting to me to have him come on campus and to the church and speak on those issues to our people. I don't think anybody does it better in the world and I've been excited that Liberty has supported him in that regard.

Hall: (56:46) Any particular event on campus that stands out in your mind over the years?

Spohn: Yes! We hosted an international creation conference. We had the best of the best from all over the world here and I thought that was a defining moment in Liberty's history and the area that I'm interested in.

Miller: (57:10) And when was this?

Spohn: That was just a few years ago. We had them here in the summer and it was wonderful. It was very well attended and we made a lot of friends to our programs here at Liberty by having these individuals come on board and be a part of that conference.

Miller: (57:29) Why don't you name some of the ones? I remember, wasn't that when Dr. John Whitcomb was here?

Spohn: correct

Miller: (57:35) Uh, the original author of the Genesis Flood

Spohn: Absolutely!

Miller: (57:37) He along with Dr. Henry Morris from...

Spohn: Absolutely!

Miller: (57:40) close by at Virginia Tech

Spohn: Yes, and Dwayne Gish, Henry Morris, and a number of individuals have been on our campus in that regard and so we've had Dr. Witt, not DeWitt, but Dr. Witt. We had a number of other individuals including Ken Ham and so forth on our campus presenting information that relates to the creation/evolution issue.

Miller: (58:00) Now, is there one of those in the works for the future?

Spohn: Absolutely! In fact February of this year [2009] to offer a counter to Darwin Day, we're having a conference here on campus and they'll be a number of creation related events that we're going to be sponsoring here and Dr. David DeWitt is responsible for that.

Miller: (58:23) Well we've talked in very specific terms about your department and your area and that. Let's talk about Dr. Falwell and Liberty University. You mentioned the church, Thomas Road Baptist Church. Can you give us some memories that you've had personally with Dr. Falwell, maybe at a faculty gathering or something like that, if you can just talk about Liberty and Dr. Falwell for a moment?

Spohn: Dr. Falwell, I first got to know a little bit about by watching The Old Time Gospel Hour before we ever came to Liberty. When I came to Liberty and he found out the degree of involvement I had with creationism, he became a great supporter of what I did. And there are many, many instances of his love and generosity to me and my family that I recall. One of the best was my middle daughter was celebrating a birthday, I have three children, and my middle

daughter was celebrating a birthday and her favorite restaurant is Shakers, one of the local restaurants here. Unbeknown to us, Dr. Falwell and Macel, and Jonathon and Cherri had come in to the restaurant, had seen us at our table, and our family was there, Kay's mom was there, my wife's mother was there. We were celebrating Christie's birthday and unbeknownst to us he called the waitress over and wanted to know what was going on at the Spohn table. And Jerry had, had me on the dais at Thomas Road praying before the offering and that kind of thing on a number of occasions so I'd gotten o know him personally just by involvement in the church. And at the end of that meal when I asked for the bill, the waitress said, well you don't have to worry about that, Dr. Falwell has taken care of it. So we found him wherever he was in the restaurant and thanked him profusely. But Dr. Falwell has always been a generous and kind man and supportive of the things that I have done at Liberty, not just me, but my family as well. All of my kids are graduates of Liberty and they were able to shake Dr. Falwell's hand and he knew our family when he was alive and supported all that we did. One other particular event, was a time, it was during a summer. Dr. Falwell had just been crucified in the general media for the stand he had taken. I knew it was wearing heavily on him. We were coming out of the backside of the old Thomas Road church right where he parked his Suburban and I walked over to him and he took my hand and held my hand for a little while and I was able to share some things with him. I said Dr. Falwell, we love you, we support you in what you do, don't weary in well doing. And of course one of the statements he had made over and over again to us and his students is "never quit!" You know, if you're going to do it, do it as unto the Lord. Give it 100% and don't back off it. And I have tried to live that in my professional life here at Liberty.

Hall: (61:18) Is that perhaps your favorite quote?

Spohn: Absolutely!

Hall: (1:01:21) from Dr. Falwell?

Spohn: Absolutely! I'm a fighter and I love that attitude that Dr. Falwell had. He never backed off and he would grab onto an idea or a dream and he would follow it up and I love that!

Miller: (1:01:36) Well now you've already mentioned that your not a prophet but now with Dr. Falwell's passing as we look ahead, what do you see in the future of Liberty University?

Spohn: Dr. Falwell left a legacy that left not only accumulating a mountain and the things on it to teach and to do God's work in terms of the church, but he also brought to himself a number of individuals that have bought into that dream. It's not just Dr. Falwell's dream anymore, its all of our dream now and we each have a stake in it, a piece of it. I'm excited about the people that are here. I'm excited for example, that God provided through Dr. Falwell's children Jonathan and Jerry Jr., the leadership at the church we need and the leadership for the university. So I am very positive about the move that is being made now in terms of Liberty University and the church. We have experienced tremendous church at Thomas Road Baptist Church over the last couple of years and I think Jonathan is doing an outstanding job.

Miller: (1:02: 40) Seems like there's kind of a revival going on right now. Since the death of Dr. Falwell Sr., there are many hundreds joining the church and these are new people being saved, not just children.

Spohn: Exactly right. And so I think that legacy and the training that the boys have seen in terms of what their dad did and how he did things, they've been able to take that baton and run with it in areas that Jerry couldn't. And so I think his sons, they bring to the church and to the university some unique background and experience that will allow them to carry us forward. And I think the support for them has been excellent, so I'm excited about it.

Miller: (1:03:24) We really appreciate the time that you've spent with us today. Is there one last story? Well we can't close off this recording without having one last story of something that has happened at Liberty, something that you really remember through the years that you wanted to get on the record?

Spohn: Well I just want to say that in all of the professional departments that I've been involved in at four different universities, the current department that I am a partied to has been by far and a way the most outstanding experience that I have ever experienced or ever even heard about. We actually love each other in that department, we care about each other, we pray with each other and for each other, and there isn't a man or woman in that department that I wouldn't lay down my life for and that feeling is mutual.

Miller: (1:04:13) Why don't you mention some of those names just real quickly?

Spohn: Dr. Paul Sattler who is my oldest friend in the world. Dr. Norm Reichenbach, Dr. David DeWitt, Dr. Doug Oliver, Professor Garth McGibben in the chemistry area, Dr. Mark Hemric in the chemistry area, Dr. Nancy Richardson, Dr. Randy Davy, Mr. Steve Perry, Dr. Mark Blaze, Dr. Nathaniel Abraham, Dr. Daniel Howe, the list goes on. I mean I could name every one of the people in that department. I believe they were brought there by God and we have a unique experience in terms of how we get along and the things we can do to support one another beyond the purely professional involvement. It's been great.

Miller: (1:05:01) Well we certainly appreciate you joining us today, Dr. Terry Spohn along with Dr. Cline Hall of our history department here a Liberty University. I'm Randy Miller, here with the Liberty University archives as we recorded this today. Thank you so much for spending some time with us.

Spohn: Thank you for the opportunity.

[End of Interview]