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**CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVES**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS J. (TIM) LITLE**

**BY CHARLOTTE E. ERWIN**

**MAY 19, 2012**

**CALTECH ALUMNI SEMINAR DAY**

**PASADENA, CALIFORNIA**

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**Thomas J. Litle**











LITTLE: Yeah, and of course the traffic had been stopped for a long time, and the kids that liked to cruise up and down were yelling and screaming. It could have gotten out of hand. But so, what happened was the police agreed with that deal. The piano—the transport that we—mysteriously appeared. They picked up the piano, and I don't know how they got the car out of there. I don't remember that part. Our whole mission had failed. We still had the piano.

ERWIN: And the car?

LITTLE: Oh, the car. I don't really remember what happened to that. But we still had the piano, so they had to improvise. They took the piano and—didn't have as much planning—but they took the piano and put it in the Occidental [College] swimming pool and all the watercolor paint came off and there was a big ring around the Occidental pool. So that was what happened to our piano.

ERWIN: Well, that's a great story! What a lot of drama and what a lot of effort.

LITTLE: Well, I don't know why it didn't get into *The Legends*. Because that was in that same league of stuff that was done.

ERWIN: It's definitely very elaborate. So was there any press coverage of that? Did you mention that?

LITTLE: I don't remember anything. Actually, I saw Roger Noll just yesterday and he was one of the gang members. He's here.

ERWIN: Oh, he was. Yes, right. He was a professor here.

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. Sure. He was one of the guys that dressed up in the motorcycle jacket and he reminded me that he was one of those, the gang. So we had a big laugh over that yesterday, I guess, or maybe the day before.

ERWIN: Are there other people that you remember who participated in this, whose names you think you could safely reveal?

LITLE: Well, I think anybody would have been proud to have participated in it, and I don't remember the [names]—it was the whole house. It was one of those things that only [could happen] at Caltech.

ERWIN: Yes.

LITLE: There were all these things that came together, and somebody said, "We've got to do something significant." And so they did. But it was pretty much everybody in the house. And as I was a freshman, I didn't know all these guys very well. But it was the people in Ricketts House. I spent my freshman and sophomore year in Ricketts House and then my junior and senior year I was in Page House because it was new then. So we did that. There were a lot of instances like that. I have other ones that are simpler, but I don't know if you want to hear them.

ERWIN: Well, this is the kind of thing we really do like to collect, and maybe this will be yet a new edition of pranks—

LITLE: Oh.

ERWIN: Following on the prior edition.

LITLE: I was going to write this one up, but I never got around to it. But Roger would be a good one. Anybody that was in Ricketts House at that time would have participated, because it was a whole big effort.

ERWIN: Well, I think this should go on – this will be recorded for the Caltech Archives and we will go down in history that way.

LITLE: Did you get any skill game stuff, skill game stories?

ERWIN: No. I don't know what a skill game is in this context.

LITLE: Oh, okay. If you want I'll give you two, and then you can decide if you want it or not.

ERWIN: Oh, okay, let's keep going then. We're at about the thirteen-minute mark.

LITLE: Okay. Well, these are shorter. We had—the houses had quarters that are called alleys. I imagine they still do.

ERWIN: They still call them that, I think.

LITLE: And we used to have inter-alley skill games. The whole idea was to have one alley challenge another alley to do something, and it was usually a challenge that was triggered by something. One of the triggers, for example, was—there was a young guy that was dating a girl in San Marino and he didn't have a car and he was an impoverished Caltech guy. And he walked home one weekend night through San Marino and walked back to the school. Well, the San Marino Police picked him up because he looked suspicious. So that was the trigger. And what we did, we had what we called an “arrest-a-thon.” We chose our six guys from each of two alleys as our teams, and they got up and they wandered around San Marino and whichever team got arrested—all six guys got arrested first, won. And we did stuff like that.

ERWIN: So that was called skill—?

LITLE: Inter-alley skill games were the generic, and that particular one was called the “arrest-a-thon.” Another one was similar and I don't really exactly remember what triggered this, but it was called the “boorishness contest.” And two teams of six people, which is typical, went down to the Pink Pussycat on Sunset Strip. And the idea was you couldn't throw anything, you couldn't do anything physical, but whichever team of six guys got thrown out first for saying inappropriate things, won. And one of our classmates—and there's a whole series of Art McGarr stories—but Art McGarr somehow managed to get thrown out within ten seconds of the start of the thing. I don't remember what he said, but it was obscene and funny and the whole

place cracked up. If you dig, people have all kinds of inter-alley skill games. There must be a hundred of them.

ERWIN: We'll see if we can pull some more out.

LITTLE: Yeah.

ERWIN: Well, I'm going to go to stop.

**[Tape ends]**