

LINDA – Fieldnotes –February 8, 2007

Subject: Interview with Pastor Grattan
Location: Manhattan Pentecostal Church
Time: 1:15- 2:30
Written February 11, 2007

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[These notes are largely reconstructed from memory, and severely adulterated memory, since I am writing several days after the interview. I did not take detailed notes during the interview, since I had to ask many questions to keep it moving beyond pleasant small talk. My sense was that Grattan did not want to reveal very much information to a couple of strangers, and he succeeded. I was very tired after this interview. Eckson was impressed by his verbal facility. After acknowledging the controversy around the word, Eckson described the pastor as “articulate.”]

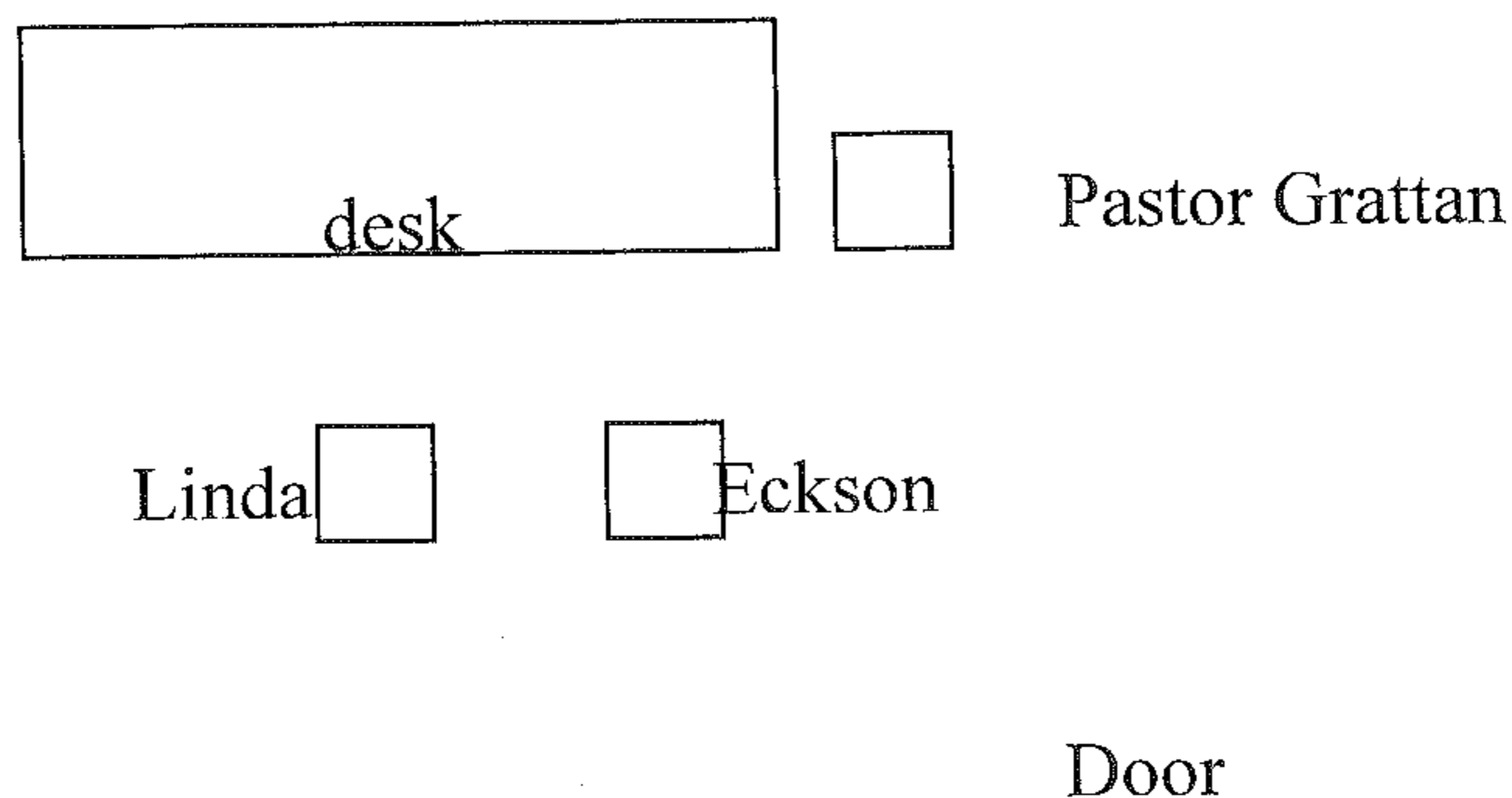
Eckson and I ran a little bit late, since I was just coming from the Columbia Open House on the Manhattanville expansion. Eckson was making a phone call when I made it to the TC cafeteria, where we planned to meet. Presumably he was calling me, but I had left my cell phone at home. He hung up and smiled when he saw me.

At the church, we tried each of the four [or three?] sets of doors in front of the church, all of which were locked. This was notable to me, as my impression was that many churches are left open for worshippers to enter at will. We rang the buzzer for the door where we entered for the LDC meeting. Eckson and I continued chatting as we waited, then a voice came on the intercom [I didn't hear what it said]. I introduced ourselves and said we had a meeting with Pastor Grattan. The door was unlocked and a short woman with dark hair and nut-brown skin met us at the top of the stairs. She told me I looked familiar and asked if I was coming to Bible study. I said I hadn't. She motioned for us to wait on a couple of seats. Eckson and I were preparing to set our things down when Pastor Grattan told us to “Come on in!” We walked down a long hallway to his office.

We made small talk on the cold as Eckson and I took off our coats and sat down on two easy chairs across from his desk. I mentioned that it was my first real winter and he asked where I moved from. When he heard I lived in San Francisco, he shared that he had lived “right on the corner of Haight and Ashbury.” I asked when, and he said in the seventies, after the excitement had died down. He was wearing a tie-dyed short-sleeved shirt with yellows and greens dominating, and khaki pants.

Grattan brought a chair to the side of his desk, facing us diagonally, as shown below.

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He asked where Eckson was from, and when he heard South Africa, he asked, "Zulu?" He asked Eckson his name, repeated it, and asked him to spell it. He seemed to write it down on a yellow pad.

This seemed to mark the beginning of the interview. I explained our project as wanting to find out what was already happening in Harlem in terms of education. Grattan asked what we hoped to accomplish, and I talked about bringing it back to social scientists and policymakers who needed to know and did not always find out what people were already doing and how they saw their own needs. He seemed to respond favorably, remarking that that was what the LDC was doing. [He had mentioned something earlier that indicated that he was worried about the legality of talking about the LDC.]

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I'm not sure when Eckson brought out the tape recorder, but he helped us by taking a large binder clip and clipping it to the bottom of the recorder so it would stand up. He then complained about having to take the minutes for the LDC meeting and how when people made noise it drowned out key words. He complained about people rooting around in the cooler for drinks (my words). I turned to Eckson and remarked that he had some experience with that too. I explained to Grattan that Eckson translated and transcribed interviews in Zulu.

At some point, Grattan said, "So this is like an interview?" I am not sure if this was before or after I brought out the consent forms. [This seemed to chill the environment considerably, which was friendly beforehand then got formalized.] I explained that the forms were to protect Columbia, not us, in case of trouble, then explained to him that he could withdraw at any time or tell us what he did not want on record. He said he would read the forms, while making reassuring noises about giving them back to us. He chuckled at the "boredom" and "irritation at researchers" part, and remarked on getting 2 forms. I told him one was for him to keep.

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I mentioned something about the LDC meeting as useful since gentrification was such a huge issue. He listed the following as the big issues:

- Education
- Jobs

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- Transportation
- Environment

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I interrupted and asked about "environment," what this meant. He replied "biohazards," which I still did not understand [perhaps the waste from research?] and building 7 or 8 levels underground.

- Traffic

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[This put the CU Open House presentation into perspective.]

I asked how he came to pastor this church, mentioning the description on the LDC website that said he had started his own church. He explained that he used to live in Springfield, Mass. "I've been here 2 years." He "can't imagine" not living here now. The church was incorporated in 1937, and used to be on 92nd St. and West End [in the West End?]. The pastor bought this building and renovated it, was here for 11 years. He then asked around for people to take over, "a few friends," and Grattan took the opportunity.

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I asked what he meant by he can't imagine living anywhere else. He listed some NY extremes: people wearing \$10,000 mink coats next to a guy with no legs, etc. "The place is crazy," he said.

I asked him, "Tell me about this community." Low-income, he responded, mostly Black and Latinos, but he sees "a lot more whites in Harlem now," lots of one-and-a-half million dollar brownstones. "A tremendous amount of change." He named Citarella's [which I did not know at the time was an upscale gourmet grocery store]. He explained that Magic Johnson had brought in Starbucks. When I expressed surprise he told us that the Starbucks at Fifth and Lenox was always packed [he used a term like "hopping" but I don't think he used that particular term]. He mentioned that he wished they would open a Starbucks nearby. He mentioned Lord and Taylor, explaining that it was "pretty upscale." I asked, "That's a department store, right?"

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He mentioned "a lot of chains" in contrast with Jimmy Jazz (here Eckson nodded in recognition) and Felio's, which sold suits and clothing. Now there are condos.

I asked who he served, and he said most people came from outside the neighborhood. They do "a lot of neighborhood outreach," such as surveys, "what do you want: anger management, parenting," financial planning, "domestic violence, youth, 'minority' youth [here he made the quote marks with his fingers], let's say youth of color."

I asked if the church offered any programs. He mentioned this weekend a relationship forum. "I would love to develop some faith-initiatives." "My biggest thrust would be youth." Youth are "caught up in the hip-hop culture," which he defined as music, dress, and culture, "a big SUV with spinner [not sure if he said this or I put it in??] rims, having

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three or four scantily clad women.” I asked if he was talking about commercial hip-hop, and he asked what other kind there was. Underground, conscious. He expressed doubt that there was much conscious hip-hop out there. [I regret bringing this up, I think it was an antagonistic move.]

Eckson asked something, and he responded, “My thinking is, you’ll never reach young people that way.” He explained the generation gap between the younger generation and the older generation, and gave some examples, including how Elvis moving his hips was considered obscene by the older generation. [I was struck by his use of Elvis rather than an African American performer.] He describes hip-hop culture as “a culture of violence, demeaning women, cursing.”

He’d like to develop programs on relationships, healthy parenting, good fatherhood, good motherhood. “There’s a lot of money in America. A lot of people don’t know how to touch that.” I asked what he meant, and he gave the example of “owning a home.” It’s possible to own a home, he implied, if people learn how. [Personal responsibility? Classes on handling finances?] Poor people in America, he said, have much more than poor people elsewhere. Eckson is nodding, “That’s true.” “If you have thirty cents in your pocket,” you have a lot more than people in other places. Grattan continued, “Homeless people, they have places to go.” “So much of what our society”... I missed the rest... “does not encourage maturity. Kick up a hoopla [on Janet Jackson’s wardrobe malfunction]. So much is money driven.” Eckson and I are laughing. “So much of our society doesn’t promote development and maturity. The church can impact some of these things.”

He talked about Christian rap. “They have battles.”

He mentioned seeing a step team at the Apollo. “You know what step is?” directed at me.

Music classes

Art class

“We used to have these classes.”

Mention of video games.

The challenge in developing these programs seemed to be a lack of financial resources and time. “It takes time” to plan initiatives, and with the possibility of a Democratic administration, money for faith-based programs could dry up. “You mean federal money?” I asked. He mentioned that he had no access to a grant writer.

He mentioned Ask and Spirit of Freedom, programs for substance abusers, “retraining” programs with “a religious component if they’re interested.” These are offered by the fellowship of the United Pentecostal Church, which also does missionary work in over 50 countries.

I asked about the religious component as education. He seemed to grow irritated, complaining about religious belief as “castigated.” “You can’t pray in the schools anymore.” It’s “superficially proper” to believe. When I ask, he gives the example of people “thanking God” or praying to God to win a fight.

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LSU

Eckson asked again about church programs. Grattan mentioned Sunday School and Sunday School teachers. As far as "something official, that is, structured, that has measurable objectives," he was still developing programs. The church serves a "predominantly low-income population" in "transition." It's "difficult to establish" programs, since they might come one Sunday and then you "don't see them for 2 Sundays." He explained, "You can travel 2 hours on the train to get to church."

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"One thing I asked the former pastor was how do people relate to one another. He said New York people tend to take care of themselves." But Grattan thought that if you can create "fellowship," people will come. "I was them to feel like they can come here," he told us. He explained that the young people were here over the weekend very late at night. He wanted to sleep, but he was happy to have them and to hear them talk.

He mentions his son again, and his leadership abilities. "Knowing how to draw them out, knowing how to relate."

The challenges: people who have been around for 30 years. He and his wife are a "husband and wife team." [Notes and memory are spotty, don't know why that's there] The older people like to sing Royal Telephone, a Jamaican hymn that references when people had to call operators to connect their calls, connecting their calls to God. The new praise leaders "just lit our worship up," "revolutionized our worship." [I get the idea that they did not sing Royal Telephone.]

"Young people find no avenue for expression. You gotta create an environment fertile for youth." But Grattan has limits. "I don't want to create a hip-hop church."

Eckson says something about learning from young people.

Grattan says, "You always have to find translators, people who can speak the language of the culture." Speaking of his son, he says, "He's young. He can talk to the young people, but he can talk to me too." He "knows how to move between both cultures." Some of what he is doing is cultivating him as a leader, to reach out to young people and bring them into the church. "They're the worm on the hook, the positive influence that draws in other people." "If you get leaders, you can build programs." It's a "self-perpetuating process."

I ask about church organization. He asks for clarification, and I stumble. He explains there is a New York Metro district, with 30 churches. In his church, there's the pastor and wife, a Board of Directors, Trustees, and a set of bylaws, like any other 501c nonprofit. They vote on resolutions. In churches in general your pastor is the chief cook. He jokes about the pastor having power and not wanting to give it up.

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"New York state is kind of unique," he explains, maybe the only state to require attorney general approval for financial transactions. The church went through some hard times, impacting him and his salary, and needed to take out a loan. He explained that the value

of their building has gone up considerably. Any nonprofit has to get approval for real estate transactions and "things of this nature." He asked if we remembered Mays, the lawyer at the meeting, providing pro bono legal counsel. [Not sure if Mays helped his church through this process.] Going through the bureaucratic process to get this loan approved was not fun. "It was a terrible process, a horrible process," he tells us.

He'd like to challenge this requirement, but "I've been told that it'd take \$15,000 to challenge this, to prepare a case."

"It's a challenge building a church," he told us. He said he's "a bit more conservative" than young people would like. He alluded to the ease of changing churches when people don't like something. "People can pack up and leave. 'Pastor Grattan's just too strict.'"

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Finances are a problem. The building commitment. "ConEdison doesn't treat us any different," he tells us, and they may have a \$1600 heat bill. New York, he complains, loves to hand out tickets. "You blink wrong, \$100 fine." He explained how he parked his car 15 feet from a fire hydrant, and somebody came by and ticketed it for being within seven feet. "That's a \$115 ticket! They're merciless! They just love to fine you in this city."

The key for church, he told us, is that "you gotta produce a good product." People will come "if you bless their lives." "You can't have a dead church, you can't sing Royal Telephone." He also mentions how weather affects attendance. When the weather's nice, 40-50 people show up. Weekly attendance is over 100, he amends.

He explains that when he was voted in, it was smaller. I ask about "voting in," and he explains that "you try out" to be the pastor. He reported that he was approved "unanimously," with about 35 people at the time. There's a difference, he tells us, between attendance and membership.

Eckson takes the opportunity to say he would love to come. Pastor Grattan says, come, come, but does not give us any details. He tells us that there's a lot of people from Spain who come, in the past several weeks a lot of Koreans. Japanese tourists. I ask for clarification, and he says lots of tourists, and he tells us how in France, especially, visiting a "so-called Black church" has become a "tourist phenomenon." People come to hear the choir and leave after they sing, before the service. I express horror, say I've heard about this at some of the larger churches. He says when people see they don't have a choir, just praise leaders, some will leave. He says this is demeaning.

He mentions that they have a Spanish church [service], with translators in the back. They want to raise money to get transmitters, for headsets. Their main sound guy is a West African, French speaker from the Congo. He tells us he would love to have a deaf ministry. "I would like to, one of the things I'd like to do is reach out to businessmen."

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He mentions John Maxwell, with whom Eckson is familiar, of Maximum Impact. This is a show on satellite TV. He wants to get a satellite hookup. "If I could get 100 people

that'd be great." He spoke last year. There's also a Christian broadcast network he'd like to get on. I ask if the show is targeted towards businessmen. He answers, "It's not for a single mother, it's for people who work at a bank, it's for supervisors." He wants to grow this church into "the church that gets business done."

He mentions that this is his second interview. A "young lady" also interviewed him. He shows us a video, called Marjoe, on a young man who was raised to be a preacher by his evangelical parents. Marjoe Gartner's name was taken from "Mary" and "Joseph." He tells us that he bought the video since it was only \$13.

He mentioned that he would get the consent forms back to me. [I had a thought that we won't get them back.] I promised to send a fax number so he could fax it to us.

[I left this interview exhausted. I forgot how intensive fieldwork was, and I had already done a couple of hours that morning at the Columbia Open House. Plus, I felt he was very slippery and good at not-telling us things. Still, the interview yielded some interesting ideas: the tension between learning from young people and rejecting an important part of youth culture, financial pressures and constraints on what the church can do well in terms of programming, and a strong assumption that "educational" means "structured" with "measurable objectives."]