Jinny Nathans: The idea of these meetings is asking people to tell a quick story, something that you want to tell or talk about, your career, and at some point I'd also like to ask you about AMS, what it's meant to you over the years and where you think we need to be going for the next hundred years. So I turn it over to you.

Clifford Mass: So what do you want me to talk about, do you have questions or just…

JN: Do any of these questions interest you?

CM: Let's see… mentor or teacher who influenced you, that sounds good. I've had a number of mentors who had a big effect on my career. One was Carl Sagan, I worked with him when I was at Cornell, and he had a big effect on me, where I went to graduate school and other things I did. Steve Schneider at NCAR, I spent a lot of time with him, he had a big effect on me. Dick Reed, who was a professor at the university of Washington. Those are probably my three biggest mentors.

JN: What did you work on with Carl Sagan?

CM: With him I worked on a numerical model of the Martian atmosphere and we actually published it, that was probably my first publication, with him.

JN: When was that?

CM: That would have been a long time ago, but it would have been... '73, '74.

JN: That is very impressive, and where was it published?

CM: In an AMS publication I think, it was in the Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences.

JN: I did not know that, that's very interesting. And what about with Steve Schneider?

CM: Steve Schneider, I visited him, I was assigned to him when I was in a summer program, this was a program for students, the summer internship in scientific computing at NCAR. They assigned me to him and we headed off and started working on climate modeling together. I ended up doing two papers with him before it was over. I spent one summer at that internship, and then he invited me the next summer and I worked some more with him, so I spent two summers at NCAR. I spent a lot of time with Steve, he had a big impact on me.

JN: And Dick Reed, I've heard his name a lot in the last couple of days when people have talked about him.

CM: Dick Reed was one of the great synoptic meteorologists of the twentieth century, and I was fortunate, he was at the UW and so many of us learned a lot about weather, weather forecasting, how to do research, having energy and enthusiasm for what they do. He had it all.

JN: How long did you work with him?

CM: I worked with him quite a bit when I was a graduate student at the University of Washington, and then I came back to University of Washington as a faculty member several years later, and I worked with him a lot during that period.

JN: That must have been very fruitful. Did you publish with him a fair amount?

CM: A little bit. Although most of it was more informal and more interactive. I have published with him, but there was a lot of feedback between us and he obviously played a very major role in AMS, he was one of the leaders of the AMS for years.

JN: Yes, absolutely, and that's a great segue. How long have you been a member of AMS, did you join when you were a student?

CM: Yes, I've been a member since the '70s, so I've been a member a long time.

JN: I guess that's good.

CM: Yeah, I guess that's good. [laughter]

JN: Well, as AMS is approaching its hundred birthday, what do you see going forward?

CM: I have some concerns with the AMS, quite frankly. I mean even the meeting we're at now is not as large as it used to be, it's declined. I've been on the membership committee of the AMS, and I know there's issues. I think there's real challenges with respect to the AGU. There's been a large transfer of primary allegiance away from the AMS to the AGU. I think that's a serious challenge for the AMS. And I think there's some other issues, like I think the Bulletin of the AMS needs radical revamping, I think it's not serving the community very well anymore. So I think the AMS has some real challenges. It's still an important organization, but I think there has to be a lot of reevaluation to ensure its health over the long term.

JN: The Bulletin is so important to AMS and so important to the history of the Society as I've been finding out, as most of my research on the history of AMS is done in the pages of the Bulletin. How would you change it?

CM: The Bulletin now is full of a lot of arcane articles that most people don't read. You know, a long discussion about some workshop or some field experiment or these long, wordy articles. Compare that to EOS, AGU has these shorter, very approachable articles that are of interest to a large number of people. I think there's a lot of other issues with the Bulletin, separating the abstract from the article I think was a terrible idea. They have those separated in the front, it's very nice to have it with the article, you can read the abstract and then go into the article, and go back and forth between it, I think that was a negative. So I think the Bulletin is rarely read cover to cover by people and I think it needs a very different level of articles, ones much more approachable to a wider group of people.

JN: Now are you always reading the print edition or do you dip into the digital?

CM: Generally my first cut is the print. I like to get home and have a glass of wine or something and sit with my little, you know, do some reading, right? To get away from the computers once in awhile. Obviously I read a lot of things online, too. Especially if I'm looking at an historical article for the Bulletin, I obviously go to the online one. And I've written a number of articles for the Bulletin, in fact some of the most popular ones, so I think I know how to write articles that are approachable. I have one that I've submitted on California wildfires, it's in the review process right now.

JN: Yeah, I think the Bulletin has definitely changed. One of the things we're doing for the hundredth anniversary is digitizing it from cover to cover all the way back, which as you know, it is not currently online that way, and it's a major effort because of the format changes over the years, so it's made it a much more interesting project than it should have been.

CM: Right. I think the big issue with AMS is that it's failed to really tap the weather enthusiast crowd. I think that those could be tremendous. People love weather, and the AMS sometimes thinks it's all too much as a professional organization, but I think it needs to be much more open to weather enthusiasts, which I think would bring a lot of energy and resources to the organization.

JN: Would that be effectively done through the local chapters?

CM: I think localization is very important. You can imagine having a journal or a magazine, similar to Weatherwise perhaps, that would be very approachable to weather enthusiasts, you can imagine local groups, AMS have these local associate member groups around the country that would take advantage of the professional members as well. But it's a way to bring in people who love weather, I think that's a huge missed opportunity for the AMS.

JN: I agree with you, and I think an initiative like that, to really make it work requires a lot of resources.

CM: But it would bring in resources. I think it's the opposite in a sense. If the AMS wants to tap huge resources, the huge population of weather enthusiasts are where they can tap it.

JN: That makes sense. So popularizing rather than making, you used the word arcane, making it sort of an arcane scientific endeavor.

CM: Right, and that interconnection is very important, between the professional side and the public side.

JN: I was surprised that this meeting doesn't seem to have very many students at it. Is that typical?

CM: There are some students, but when you say students, I see some graduates. There are some students here, but the meeting is less than it was. A lot of people, leading people are not here, and the size is down quite a bit. I mean, I can remember the meetings back thirty years ago, twenty or thirty. Much larger.

JN: I did this same thing at the Hurricanes meeting a few weeks ago, and that was much bigger than this meeting.

CM: Right. I think what's happened is a number of the specialty meetings have bled off the energy of this one. There's not much of a hurricane session here, as an example, a lot of the most exciting things are not here. Some things, some are, but not enough.

JN: And this meeting is not every year.

CM: No, it's every other year.

JN: Every two years. It's interesting to have your observations because you certainly know over time, and can mark the changes.

CM: It's disturbing to me. I've talked to some other old-timers like Lance Bosart, everybody acknowledges it.

JN: That's interesting, I interviewed him yesterday.

CM: He certainly has a good memory, longer than mine.

JN: He has a wonderful memory and a wonderful perspective. We talked about sailing on the Charles River.

CM: Okay, well, that's good too. [laughter]

JN: Is there anything else that you would like to add? As I said, this is a quick interview, this isn't the overview of your life and career.

CM: Right. I'm here to answer any questions that you want me to talk about.

JN: I guess I would just ask if you wanted to add anything or raise anything else or tell me your favorite graduate student is…

CM: Oh, I wouldn't do that. [laughter]

JN: Well in that case, I'm going to hit the button, and we will stop recording.