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KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID A. KING

CONDUCTED AND EDITED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

KSU ORAL HISTORY SERIES, NO. 109

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Friday, 29 June 2012
Location: Sturgis Library, Kennesaw State University

TS: David, we always start by just asking about your background and where you were born, where you grew up and so on. So, why don't you talk about that?

DK: Well, I was born in Atlanta, a fourth generation Georgia native, which is a rare thing. I was born in Piedmont Hospital, and I'm happy to say that my two sons were also born in Piedmont Hospital. So they're now fifth generation natives. At the time I was born, I lived in southwest Atlanta.

TS: What year was that?

DK: That was 1967. I lived in southwest Atlanta, and in 1971 my family—at that time I also had a younger brother and sister—my family and I moved to Cobb County like so many others. I grew up off Bells Ferry Road very near to the campus and lived in the same house for my entire life until I grew up and moved away from home. In a lot of ways my childhood was very provincial, and it was certainly regional. I like to tell people that by the time I was twenty-two, I had never been anywhere, and I really thought that Valdosta, Georgia, was the end of the world. That was the farthest we had ever been.

TS; Never been to Florida?

DK: When I graduated from college, my parents took me on a trip to Washington, D.C., and New York City as a graduation present, and my eyes were opened. That was my first real trip outside of the South.

TS: Where did you go to college?

DK: I went to college first at Berry in Rome and then to Georgia State just very briefly. Then I had three wonderful years at the University of Georgia in Athens. It was a great experience and a great place to be a student. Following that I immediately went into a graduate program at Georgia State, and then in 1992 I was employed here.

TS: So you've hardly ever been out of Georgia then, metro Atlanta.

DK: Well, we've been fortunate to be able to travel quite a bit in Mexico, and I've done study abroad trips to England.

TS: Let's go back because one of the purposes of this interview is to talk about early memories of the Kennesaw campus. Your mother [Nancy S. King] started working here, I believe, full time in '71, wasn't it? [Ed. Note: 1972]

DK: Well, the way that she tells it is that one afternoon the family was out for a drive, and this would have been shortly after we moved up here. That would have been '71 or '72.

TS: You were four at the time [you moved to Cobb]?

DK: Yes, I was four.

TS: Were you the oldest?

DK: I'm the oldest. Literally, the way she tells it, they came around the bend, and here was this little college. My father [Charles King] suggested to her that she investigate part-time teaching because at that time she had a master's degree.

TS: She had been teaching school in Fulton County, I guess.

DK: In DeKalb County at Lakeshore High School in DeKalb County.

TS: Did your father get a job here; is that why you came?

DK: He did not get a job here. At the time we moved up here he was employed by the New England Life Insurance Company. Then subsequently he went to work with the Paul Revere Life Insurance Company, but we just moved in the so-called white flight.

TS: Out of DeKalb County?

DK: Out of Fulton County.

TS: She was teaching in DeKalb, but you were living in Fulton?

DK: Yes. We lived in the Cascade Heights neighborhood of Fulton County. Do you happen to know where the Tup Holmes golf course is?

TS: No.

DK: Well, that's the area that I was a small boy in.

TS: But it was changing ethnically at the time? When you say white flight

DK: Yes. In fact, I remember my best friend was an African-American boy named Curtis. He lived two houses down from us, and Curtis is an important figure in

- my life because he figures in the first lie that I ever told. He and I had conspired together to watch the Amazing Spiderman cartoon at his house. That was strictly forbidden, and my mother found out about it. She asked me where I had been, and I lied about it, and one way or another I got caught. But he was my dear friend. I spent every day with him. But, yes, the neighborhood was caught up in that very strange period of Atlanta history.
- TS: Why were you forbidden to go to his house?
- DK: Not to go to his house, but to watch cartoons because I would act out everything I'd see.
- TS: I see. One of the things I've written about is whether white flight is an accurate term, because there are a lot of reasons why people moved, including better values for a home and better schools and less crime. It gets really, really complicated sometimes what the issues are. But at any rate, things were changing, and they decided that probably Cobb County would be a better place to raise children.
- DK: I can talk a little bit more about my memories of Cobb County in 1971-72 if you want me to. I can tell you a couple of things that made an impression on me. One was that my mother absolutely broke down in tears when we moved out here because she thought that my father had taken us to the middle of nowhere.
- TS: Oh, he was the one who wanted to move?
- DK: It was the middle of nowhere in a lot of ways. The ride from our house to my school at the old Walker School on Waterman Street—the ride to school took us literally through two cattle crossings. The road was marked Cattle Crossing, and on either side were pastures full of black Angus cattle.
- TS: How far out Bells Ferry were you?
- DK: This was in the Maggie Valley subdivision—so, very close to the Cherokee County line. There were no traffic lights. The intersection of Bells Ferry and Chastain was marked by a sign that said simply, “Crossroads.”
- TS: I know somebody who lived on Bells Ferry for many years out that way that said her dog used to take naps on the road in the middle of the afternoon.
- DK: I can believe it. Highway 41 was referred to by everybody as “The Four-Lane.”
- TS: So you actually went to the Waterman Street School? That goes way back.
- DK: I went to the Waterman School for kindergarten, first grade and second grade.

TS: Then they moved out to the old Sprayberry High School.

DK: That's right. But to go to a grocery store at the time required a drive all the way down the Four-Lane—almost to Windy Hill Road. There was nothing here at all except a little country store that everyone referred to as Chastain's. It was on Bells Ferry Road, and Mrs. Chastain ran the little store. And there were two small lakes.

TS: I've got an interview that a student did with her—Alfie Chastain.

DK: I used to fish in the lakes.

TS: Oh, you fished in it?

DK: All the time, every day. But those days are gone.

TS: That's changed big time. What about coming out to the campus here? What do you remember about Kennesaw Junior College?

DK: Well, there are several things. I can tell you that I learned to hit a golf ball on the Kennesaw Junior College campus. I learned to hit a baseball on the campus. I learned how to cast a fishing rod on this campus. I learned how to drive a car on this campus. I learned how to kiss on this campus. At that time, the campus was, obviously, as big as it is now, but it was empty. So it was a wonderful place to play.

TS: Well, it was 152 acres then, not quite as big as now, but it's pretty much the same.

DK: My mother and father played tennis on the tennis courts every weekend. This is why to this day I loathe tennis because they would drag the three of us along with them. We would sit in the heat against the chain link fence and just pant while they played tennis. As we got older, we would explore. So, they would play tennis, and the three of us would wander around. At that time this was a wonderful place to wander.

TS: A lot of woods to wander through. All of our forests are disappearing. They're just about all gone, but we did used to have a lot of them. Okay, so any other impressions about the campus or anything from that early period?

DK: Well, as a child my main impression was that it was a wonderful place to come and play. As I got a little older, and I began to realize what this place really was, I was quite impressed with the fact that it was a college. When I was a high school student, I was very active here. I used the library here all the time. I learned how to use a computer for the first time here. I entered a contest back when the school used to take part in the Cobb County Symposium. I entered an essay contest. I still remember it. I wrote the essay on what it means to be a success, and I wrote

the essay in Humanities Room 102. I won the essay contest, and I was presented the award by Dr. [Betty L.] Siegel. I think it would have been [English department chair Robert W.] Bob Hill also who gave me the award. It was a \$100.00 prize, and Dr. Siegel said, "What will you do with the money?" I said, "Buy gas for my car!" My mother was horrified that that was my answer. At that time I realized what it was that my mother did, and I realized what this place was, and it became much more than just a playground. We used to come out all the time with her when she would work, and we would play in the halls of the English department. I grew up as a high schooler looking up to people such as Bob Hill and Bob Barrier and Don Fay and John Greider and Barbara Stevenson, Dot Graham, this old guard of the English department. I thought they were wonderful. Linda Tucker. I wanted to be like they were. I knew from a very early age that I wanted to be in an academic life, and all of those days spent in what was then Kennesaw College were really instrumental in that. I spent hours in this library, hour after hour.

TS: I was trying to think on the dates. You may not have been old enough for the old library that's the Pilcher Building now.

DK: Yes, I remember the old library. Then, as computers began to come in, the upper floor of the Pilcher became like a computer lab.

TS: That's right.

DK: I can remember writing term papers in high school in that computer lab with the old floppy discs.

TS: We've got a story from Steve Scherer of your mother trying to do her dissertation on those, and she lost the file.

DK: That's right. But I think he was able to reclaim them in some magical way. I think he was able to retrieve something. In fact, that's funny you mention him because he was like a saint almost because he had come to the rescue.

TS: I think he said he was on another floor when he heard her scream. Okay, so you don't go far from home to go to college, but you do live off campus, I guess, at Berry and UGA, lived in the dorms and such as that.

DK: That's right.

TS: Then you start graduate school at Georgia State. Is that the way it works, right after graduating?

DK: Right out of UGA I went to Georgia State, and I did a master's degree in English with a concentration in poetry writing.

TS: Any reason you chose Georgia State?

DK: Mainly because of the poet David Bottoms. David was a faculty member in the English department there. He and I had met when I was seventeen, eighteen years old. I attended the annual English department summer writer's workshop, and he was a guest faculty member one particular summer. He and I got to know each other, and he was quite taken with my work and encouraged me to come and study with him. So I did. He was the main reason that I went to Georgia State. While I was at State I met two other faculty members who had a deep influence on me, William Sessions and Victor Kramer. I'm friends with both of those men to this day. In fact, I just saw Victor a couple of days ago.

TS: What made them good mentors for you?

DK: Well, they were very important to me because at that time I was in a religious quest. I was searching for something different.

TS: You grew up Baptist and went to First Baptist in Marietta.

DK: That's right. I was raised as a good, devout, Southern Baptist. I became a Roman Catholic under the influence in many ways of Sessions and Kramer and some of the work that I did with them. I was Kramer's graduate research assistant, and I worked on the journal, *The Thomas Merton Annual* and also worked with him on an oral history for the Monastery of the Holy Spirit down in Conyers. All of that work helped me in my conversion. I'll tell you a funny story about Sessions. I took Sessions' Milton course

TS: Not very Catholic!

DK: In a sense it was the second time that I had had it because my mother had taken it when she was pregnant with me in 1967.

TS: So you were there whether you knew it or not.

DK: I was in the womb with Dr. Sessions. Then twenty-five years later I took the same course, and I used my mother's Milton book and her notes.

TS: Hopefully, he had updated his lectures in twenty-five years!

DK: It was fascinating to see in fact that it was almost word for word.

TS: Oh no.

DK: It was exactly what had been said a quarter of a century before. It was uncanny. Even some of the anecdotes were the same. But he was a wonderful teacher. I

think he was so good with Milton he didn't need to revise anything. He had done it, and it was great, and what more was there to say?

TS: I won't comment on that! Well, Milton is not exactly somebody that would lead you to Catholicism except maybe in reaction.

DK: No, but it was the influence of Bill himself, really. He and I are still friends today. We see each other occasionally. We talk about our projects.

TS: What was it that led you away from the Southern Baptist Convention?

DK: It was a fascination, really, with the liturgy, initially. So it was an imaginative process first of all. I was attracted to a liturgical kind of church. But then it became much more spiritual, and I was actually intrigued by the sacramental aspects of the church. Too, so many of the writers that I admired, people like Merton and Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy—they were all Catholics. I felt a kinship with them in a lot of ways. So, yes, I came into the church in 1993, and I was confirmed

TS: Twenty-six years old?

DK: Yes, I was twenty-six, and I was confirmed at the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Counsel, which was on the top floor of the Park Place office building at Georgia State, and Dr. Kramer and Dr. Sessions were my confirmation sponsors. It's funny because everything that was in the Catholic Center at Georgia State—the library, the altar, the statuary, everything—it's all now at the Catholic Center here [at KSU]. So it followed me up the highway. When we opened the Catholic Center here at Kennesaw back in the mid-1990s, they closed the center at Georgia State, and all of the items I've described were brought here.

TS: Why did they close the center at Georgia State?

DK: It was not being used. There apparently at that time was no interest or involvement. The priest, the chaplain, at State had been reassigned. There was probably all sorts of behind the scenes maneuvering that went on, but the archdiocese bought the house on what was then Frey Lake Road, and they began to fill it up with all of this stuff from Georgia State, including a fantastic library. There's a funny story about what happened at the library. We had a chaplain here. His name was Father Paul Bourke, and Father Paul is now at Holy Spirit in Sandy Springs. He was our chaplain for one year, and he and I got to be very close. Well, he took a position at Southern Catholic College, which was in Dawsonville, and which is now bankrupt. It's closed. But when he was reassigned from Kennesaw State to Southern Catholic, he took the library with him, and I'm telling you, it was a big library. It was bigger than this room and this is quite a large office.

TS: What was his justification for taking the library with him?

DK: I don't know, but he did. He took it with him, and now nobody knows where it is.

TS: My goodness. Well, did he think it was his library?

DK: I suppose so. He was quite a conservative priest, and the priest that we have here now is quite liberal. I suspect that Father Paul didn't want his library to fall into the hands of a liberal priest, so he took it with him!

TS: In '93 you have your official conversion, and at that time you're through the master's program or still finishing up?

DK: I was through with the master's program, which I finished in 1992.

TS: You had to because you started here in '92.

DK: Yes. I started here when I was finishing my thesis. I started here simply because one evening my father and I had come to a poetry reading. Bob Hill was at the reading, and after the reading my father wanted to talk to Bob. They were always pretty close. My father said to Bob, and he had his arm around me in a very fatherly way—he said, "Robert, what would a young man who needs to get a teaching job need to do if he wanted to teach part-time?" Bob said, "Well, that young man should just send me a cover letter." So the young man in question—me, of course—sent a cover letter. I began teaching that summer quarter. I taught English 101, and I was the youngest person in the room. It was a night class, and at that time, you know, we had so many nontraditional students, especially in the evening. I was the youngest person in the room, but I taught that class, and I've never left.

TS: I started teaching here when I was twenty-five. I don't remember ever being in a class where I was the youngest though. There might have been a lot of students older than me.

DK: I was the youngest.

TS: How about that. And this was your first time to teach a class?

DK: My first time.

TS: You didn't do any teaching at Georgia State?

DK: I'm trying to think. I might have done an occasional guest spot. I honestly can't remember. I would say that my first real teaching experience was that course in the summer of '92.

- TS: I guess for part-time Bob Hill had the final say. It didn't have to go to Dean Beggs or anything?
- DK: My memory of it is that I sent a cover letter to Bob Hill. He said come for an interview, and I came. We talked for about 10 minutes, and he said, "You are finished with your master's degree, aren't you?" I said, "Well, no, I have to finish my thesis, and I'm supposed to graduate in August." He said, "Well, that's okay. If you've finished your course work, you can go ahead and teach." I had to produce a letter, I think, stating that I had in fact finished my course work and was expected to graduate in August, and he went ahead and hired me. That summer I got a telephone call. I was living with my parents at the time, and I got a telephone call from Bob Hill, who said, "I have a temporary full-time position available for academic year '92-'93. Do you want it?" I said, "Absolutely I want it." Then the temporary contract was renewed '93-'94, and then at that time I was told I needed to get a Ph.D. if I want to stay. Then that leads us into a whole other
- TS: So those two years you weren't taking any courses at night or anything?
- DK: No, '92-'94 I was not enrolled.
- TS: So you're teaching full-time here.
- DK: Teaching full-time.
- TS: Learning the ropes.
- DK: I absolutely loved it. In '94 Bob said, "It looks like the temporary contract will not be up for much longer. If you want to have any chance of staying, not just here, but in the profession, you need to get a Ph.D." Well, at that time I had become deeply interested in film, and I had essentially educated myself in film studies. So I decided that I wanted to do a Ph.D. in film. I applied to several programs, and I was accepted at New York University, which has a fantastic film school, the best one on the East Coast. The trouble is NYU wouldn't give me any money to come. There was no hope of an assistantship or anything like that. So I had to make a decision because I had been accepted also at Georgia State, and Georgia State was willing to let me do an interdisciplinary program in English and film. So I chose to stay here and go to Georgia State. I didn't go to New York, stayed here, lost my position in the English department, but got a new position in what was then the department of Developmental Studies. I taught Developmental English Composition and what was then KC 101 for '94 until I finished the degree in 2001.
- TS: Was Joanne [E.] Fowler running the department then?

DK: Joanne Fowler was my first chair in that department, and then Becky [Rebecca S.] Casey was the second one. So I ended up getting to study film like I wanted to, but I also got to do the traditional English. I had to do double the course work. Then I wrote an integrated dissertation that involved film in the South, that is southern literature and religion.

TS: What was the title of the dissertation?

DK: It was Christ Haunted—which are O’Connor’s words—“Christ Haunted: Religion and the South in American Film.”

TS: What was the thesis?

DK: Well, my general thesis was that a filmmaker who aspired to make a movie about the South could not do so unless he understood the unique culture of the region, including especially its religions. Some would say primitivism, but I would say insight, wisdom. If you don’t appreciate that aspect of the culture, I don’t think you’ll ever quite figure out what it is that’s going on.

TS: What year did you finish?

DK: In 2001. The same year I was married—2001 was a good year. And in fact I met my wife here at Kennesaw State, so that’s another important personal connection I have with the school. I actually proposed to her in my old office in the library!

TS: It’s good to get the dissertation out of the way and have that all behind you. Did you say that you got married at Sacred Heart?

DK: Yes. My wife Allison and I were married at Sacred Heart Catholic Church on June 16, 2001, Bloomsday [celebration of the life of novelist and poet James Joyce].

TS: That’s good that you can remember that!

DK: Yes.

TS: So you were both going to Sacred Heart at that time?

DK: Yes.

TS: Was that Father [Stephen T.] Churchwell at that time?

DK: Yes. Churchwell was supposed to marry us, but he backed out at the last minute. He had a chance to take a trip.

TS: He took the trip and dropped your marriage.

DK: About a month before our wedding we were left without a priest to marry us, but the man who confirmed me, Father David Dye, and the priest from whom I took instruction, he married us, which was nice. Can I tell you a funny story? I'm embarrassed, but this will tell people for posterity just how meager the wages were for an instructor at Kennesaw State in 2001. It's customary when you're married to give the minister or the priest a token of appreciation, so I wrote Father Dye a check for, I think, \$100.00, and the check bounced. We came back from our honeymoon, and I discovered a notice from the bank that I had indeed written the good Father a bad check. I was mortified. I called him, and I said, "Father Dye, I am so sorry. Please feel free to run that check through again, and I assure it will cash." But I haven't spoken to David Dye since then!

TS: But at least the check went through the second time.

DK: Yes, it went through the second time. But it was tough, not much money in Developmental English Composition.

TS: I guess not—probably about the lowest on the totem pole at that time.

DK: Exactly.

TS: What did you think about teaching developmental classes? What did you think about the students, and did you enjoy working with people who needed extra help in English?

DK: I'm sure I did. I enjoyed helping people. The students were eager, and they worked hard. I don't know how many of them went on to succeed long-term. It was a challenge to teach that kind of student, but it was rewarding.

TS: I'm trying to think now when we started phasing out Developmental Studies. I guess we were really phasing it out by that time, weren't we?

DK: Well, that's about the time that it began to, as you say, be phased out. So the department had to come up with new programs, really, to keep itself alive. What we came up with were things such as the honors program, the first-year experience, the learning communities. All of those programs of course have been very successful.

TS: Of course, your mother had a hand in all of those things too.

DK: Yes, and I would like to state for the record that I had quite a hand in them too. I envisioned the textbook, for example, for the first-year experience program. That was my idea. It had not been done anywhere in the country. In fact, you contributed to that textbook. You wrote a short history of Kennesaw State, which was one of my favorite things.

TS: What was the title? It was a play on KSU, I guess, Knowledge, Something and—

DK: Oh, it was *Making Connections, Achieving Success, Understanding Others*. You took the “K” from Making and the “S” in Success and the “U” in understanding, and you had the acronym KSU. You see, at the time that was all very clever, but that’s what it was like here at that time. The book really was a success nationally, and it brought us a lot of attention. Then the learning communities, which Joanne Fowler envisioned—I came up with the idea to link them thematically so that you had some more serious academic content. I was made director of the Learning Communities Program, which we called the acronym CLASS, and I directed that program for two years.

TS: What did CLASS stand for?

DK: Communities for Learning Success. The idea behind it again that was very novel at the time was to link them around a theme. So both the textbook and the thematic learning communities have become a national model, and they were essentially my ideas for which I’ve never really been recognized.

TS: No, I don’t think so, not that I was aware of.

DK: But I was so naive in those days about the way of the academic world. I just came up with ideas that I thought were good and then came up with more ideas, and I never really thought about one should claim credit for it.

TS: Well, you hope in the academic world that you don’t have to toot your own horn, that people give credit where credit is due.

DK: You would hope.

TS: I’ve probably still got a copy or two of that book, but were you one of the co-authors of it?

DK: I was the primary editor and author along with Kathy [L.] Matthews and Joe [Joseph S.] Bocchi and Michael [D.] Redd, and then it went through three editions.

TS: There was something about trouble with the publisher because they dumped my article after that.

DK: Our first publisher was not a good publisher. I can’t remember the name of the publisher.

TS: Was it Hunt-Kendall?

DK: Kendall-Hunt took it over for the second and third.

TS: Oh, they're the second one.

DK: Yes. And Kendall-Hunt did a good job with it. By the time it was ready to go into a fourth edition, that's when the problems started. By that time I had actually left the department and gone back to English.

TS: Have you ever thought about being connected to University College here?

DK: No, I wanted to go back to the English department. That is what I had trained to do, so I have not missed my days in University Studies, now University College, although the work that we did there was really ground-breaking work. Kathy Matthews especially—Kathy was a mentor to me in many ways, and Kathy and I did some stuff that was really visionary. It's gotten so much recognition, and I hate to even say it, but *U.S. News & World Report*, *Time* magazine. There are good programs in that college, but I wanted to do something else.

TS: Okay, 2001, you get your doctorate and get married and is that—there were several years you weren't teaching here. When do you come back full time?

DK: Just to clarify, my first permanent full-time year was '92-'93, then '93-'94.

TS: That's the two years that you're temporary full-time?

DK: Right. Then in '94-'95 I signed a tenure track—actually, I wasn't aware at the time that it was a tenure track appointment—it was an instructorship.

TS: How can that be in a tenure track if it's an instructorship?

DK: This was a crazy time at Kennesaw State, if you think back to the mid-1990s. That's the roots, really, I think, of when everything began to change, and we began to envision ourselves as bigger and broader than we really were in fact. I think a lot of mistakes were made with instructors especially. We've had to deal with this in the English department. Instructors were hired at first without any indication that we were tenure track, and then it was announced that we were in fact eligible for tenure, but not every instructor was eligible. It was very confusing. I'll never figure it out. In short, what happened to me was when I finished my Ph.D. in 2001, I was immediately promoted to assistant professor.

TS: Okay, so you were here every year.

DK: Yes, I was here every year.

TS: That's right. I guess I should have asked the question when you got out of Developmental Studies and get back to the English department?

DK: That would have been in 2004 or 2005. I left primarily because Dean Linda Noble wanted somebody to come to the English department and put together a minor in Film Studies. I was qualified to do that, so that's what sent me back to the English department.

TS: Okay, so you go the English department, and what were you teaching when you get there? Are you teaching the film class at that point?

DK: I was teaching film. We developed three initial new courses at first that I developed along with Dr. Michael [T.] Tierce. So I taught the film, and I became very quickly involved into our Gateway to the Major course, English 2145, and our senior seminar, English 4620, and in fact that's my favorite course to teach, the senior seminar.

TS: Why is that?

DK: Well, I'm able to do topics that I probably wouldn't be able to do otherwise. I've done wonderful senior seminars in Flannery O'Connor, O'Connor especially, and I did a recent senior seminar on the Vietnam War, Film and Literature, of the Vietnam War. That was really a success.

TS: Now that it's history and people look back at what their parents' generation did.

DK: Yes. Most of the students in the class I had last semester actually had family members who served. For most of them, they were grandfathers, but we had some remarkable moments in that course. Students would bring in things that they had discovered in their families. The most powerful was a student who brought in letters from General William Westmoreland and Lyndon B. Johnson expressing their sympathy for the death of the student's grandfather. The student had never really even known the full story, but she does now. We had people who brought in their grandparents' draft notice, "Greetings: You are hereby ordered to report for induction into the U.S. Armed Services." You put those kinds of things up on the screen, and students look at them, and they're just in awe. I had a student who wrote me yesterday. She had been a student in that class, and she wrote to tell me that she had come across her father's 1968 high school yearbook—his senior year—and she was reading what people had signed in his yearbook. Many of them had written things along the line of, "Have fun killing Gooks." She was not shocked at all because she had the context. She knew what 1968 was like for a high school boy just out of high school without hope of going to college. She knew what the future held. But the best part about that course is the interviews that students conducted with Vietnam veterans. I've taught this class in many different ways here at Kennesaw, and that's always a centerpiece of it—the oral histories—where a student talks with a veteran, and they're amazing. They need to be compiled into a book. I've amassed about seventy-five of them by now.

TS: You put the burden on them to find a veteran?

DK: I helped them. I have a good resource with the Vietnam Veterans of America Georgia Chapter here in Marietta over off Gresham Road. Two of my students last semester actually went to the VVA meetings and met veterans there. We have wonderful guest speakers. We had a speaker who came last semester who had actually fought in the Battle of Hamburger Hill, and he brought all sorts of photographs and mementos. It was just fascinating.

TS: Do you think there is a decent movie about Vietnam?

DK: Oh, yes, if you look at them as combat films, they're great. *Hamburger Hill* is a wonderful combat film. *Platoon* is a wonderful combat movie. If you look at them in terms of film genre, they're fantastic. If you look at them as records, historical documents of what it was like to be a foot soldier in Vietnam, no, they're not good. They could never capture fully what that experience was for so many people, but as combat movies, they're great. *Apocalypse Now* was in a class all of its own. The *Deer Hunter* is a wonderful example of how film can be used for collective atonement or lamentation but they're not meant to be realistic portrayals of what it was actually like. Their artistic expressions of a moment are very important in our collective twentieth-century history, but they're not historical documents. However, we do show documentary films, archival films that are historical. The students learn the difference between what is history and what is an artistic interpretation of history.

TS: I used to use a book in our methodology class entitled *After the Fact*, and the last chapter analyzed films on Vietnam.

DK: I've read that. That's a good little book. We have it at home, actually, because I think Allison used it.

TS: That very well could have been. I started using that book back in 1986, and I don't know how many editions it's gone through since that time, but it's a pretty unique approach to writing history, I think, where you take a topic and then show the historiography or whatever your purpose is. I don't know whether it's still the concluding chapter, but it was for a long time. What about the *Green Berets*?

DK: We looked at the *Green Berets* as an example of propaganda, which, in fact, it was in many ways—underwritten by the Department of Defense, fully supported by the Pentagon. In fact, Robin Moore's original work—the Pentagon stepped in and said, "Look, let's not call this historical; let's not call this journalistic; let's call this fiction." There was a bit of arm twisting, and Robin Moore agreed to refer to his book as fiction, even though it's not. The book is not really that fictional. But then when John Wayne got a hold of the movie, of course, he twisted it to fit his own political agenda. But that's not Vietnam either.

- TS: I think *After the Fact* mentions the ending with a sunset over the ocean, but there's not a west coast of Vietnam.
- DK: That's right!
- TS: There's been a lot of historical work, I guess, from almost when I was in graduate school on history in film. I remember going to hear a lecture ages ago on the films of the 1950s and how they fit in with the Cold War. I'm not sure it was exclusively films. It may have been TV shows too. *I Led Three Lives*, things of that sort. It's fascinating how a film can become an historical document as an insight into what people were thinking in a particular era, not necessarily whether they portrayed things accurately, but what they tell you about the age in which they were written. Okay, you're teaching and developing those film courses at Kennesaw, and you're doing your senior seminar and Intro to English. Is this a course that all the English majors take?
- DK: All the English majors take it. I really enjoy teaching it.
- TS: This is for the purpose of seeing whether they really want to be an English major?
- DK: Part of it is. Why do you want to be an English major? What do you need to do to succeed? What are the key areas? So we talk about language, literature, theory, research. The students' research skills are atrocious. There have been a number of studies done that have demonstrated the opposite of what people thought in the advent of the digital revolution. Students have, in fact, not improved in research. They've actually gotten less savvy, even when it comes to doing research on the computer. So I spend a good deal of time in that course on basic methods of literary research. We use current technology, but we also use some very old-fashioned approaches. One thing that they love the most is coming to the library and actually engaging with books.
- TS: That would be the equivalent of our History 2270, Themes in History, which theoretically at least should prepare them for all the courses that they take. Then they have a senior seminar at the end. In our case, the problem was for years that it took so long for them to get in the HIST 2270 course. They were practically through all their coursework by the time they got in.
- DK: Well, we have made, in the English department, this course a prerequisite for the 3000 and 4000 level courses.
- TS: Oh. So you've got to get them into it early on, and I guess they get priority in signing up for it or something.
- DK: We teach enough sections each semester, even in the summer, that they don't have any trouble getting into the class.

TS: Okay, about eight years now you've been in a real tenure track position in the English department.

DK: I was tenured in 2005, promoted to associate professor in 2006, and I've had a wonderful decade in terms of teaching and scholarship, creative work, service.

TS: Why don't you talk about that a little bit?

DK: Well, I've done a number of things with Thomas Merton, Flannery O'Connor, Alfred Hitchcock.

TS: Really? Is he a Catholic writer?

DK: Yes.

TS: Or producer, director?

DK: On all three of them I have important referred publications. I was really honored to give an invited lecture at O'Connor's home in February of this year. It was actually on some of the connections between Flannery O'Connor and Alfred Hitchcock.

TS: February, is that her birth date?

DK: No, I think that's just a month when everybody has decided that Milledgeville is most comfortable. I've done some good work—lots of service in the community. Of course, you know about the stuff for the *Georgia Bulletin*. That was the impetus for this meeting in fact.

TS: Yes, and you got your award the other day too.

DK: Yes I did. I don't know how you know about that.

TS: Well, Laura Dabundo put it on the Interdisciplinary Studies list. I got on their list even though I've never done anything with their department. She sent a message announcing "a worthy honor for one of our own."

DK: That's nice.

TS: Catholic Press Association, Second Prize, Best Regular Column in the Arts and Culture. That's great. I was quite surprised to see your name in the *Georgia Bulletin*. You may have been writing there ten years; I don't know; but the first time I noticed it was a few weeks ago.

- DK: And you found it on the way to the crossword puzzle, which is how most people find it, I'm afraid!
- TS: Well, usually I look for Lorraine Murray's column because she used to be out here at Kennesaw, and I've corresponded with her once or twice over the years. She has a quite interesting story, too, I think, of conversion.
- DK: Yes, she does.
- TS: But I'll have to keep looking for yours now that I know that you're writing in there every month. You had a good column about some English Catholic writers.
- DK: Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and Muriel Spark, all three converts.
- TS: How does the English department view that kind of writing?
- DK: I think most people are supportive of it.
- TS: Do you list it under scholarship or service or what?
- DK: Well, the trick is to try to make people understand that it's actually a little bit of teaching, a little bit of scholarship, a little bit of service.
- TS: So it's the integration of the three.
- DK: They're all three integrated. My whole purpose in starting the column was to remind people about the Catholic artistic tradition, especially in the twentieth century because that's my area of expertise. So it was definitely a service, but the more and more that I've written—they'll become a book. I've had a few overtures already to compile these things into a book. I would stand fast and say, absolutely, this is scholarly work because it's educating or reacquainting people. In most cases, sadly, it is giving them new information. It's accurate information, but it is teaching. I think that's what any good scholarship should do. I would hope people would understand, too, that it goes beyond the local. The paper has a circulation of 80,000, and it's online. The columns are sometimes syndicated; so they go out by Catholic News Service everywhere. The point of this is that they were written with the aim of teaching and reacquainting, as I've said, and I'm proud that they were recognized. That's a highly competitive award. I didn't even know the paper had nominated me for it, so it was a nice surprise.
- TS: Well, of course, we've been through this in the History department, and it's very relevant to me in that the kind of research that I've done over the years is public history [applied scholarship]. Our Public History program and the history profession have really gotten into it in recent years. The Organization of American Historians and other professional organizations have produced position papers on how you evaluate nontraditional types of scholarship—the traditional

being, you write an article for a peer-reviewed journal, and then you can say this is scholarship because it's been approved by my peers. But the trick is, when your peer reviewers are not anonymous academics at another college, how do you document the quality of the work. When colleagues like Catherine Lewis curate an exhibit, who are the peer reviewers. What if the peer reviewers are people from the public who don't necessarily have a university affiliation, but still may be very knowledgeable about what you're doing? It's complicated. Maybe, if I could get your impressions about how you do this in English: how do tenure and promotion committees deal with this? After six years, you're probably at the stage for full professorship now, so this may be very relevant to you at this point of how you measure these things.

DK: It's highly relevant. In fact, I went today to a workshop on tenure and promotion because I'm thinking about going up for full professor. I feel like I'm ready. I feel like if you look at my holistic performance in teaching, scholarship, service over a twenty-year period here that I'm more than ready. But the question is, is there enough of what we consider to be traditional scholarship? Well, sure, I have my share of peer-reviewed articles in journals, and those peer-reviewed articles in some cases have been read by only a handful of people. On the other hand, I've got close to thirty really insightful and engaging pieces of writing that have meant something to people. I get letters from people. People call me. I know that I'm doing what I intended to do, which was to produce something for an audience that teaches them and engages them. If we're going to talk at Kennesaw State about engagement, then we should value engagement when we see it, and this is an obvious kind of engagement. That's the argument that I have to make.

TS: Yes, I think an audience of 80,000 as opposed to six or eight scholars is . . .

DK: Well, but you could argue too that of those 80,000, 75,000 of them are on the way to the crossword puzzle! But I know for a fact that I have reached people like I have intended to do. And I do want these pieces to grow in number and then be assembled into a book.

TS: It would be nice to do a book. Are you thinking about a publisher for it?

DK: I have a few in mind.

TS: Do you think about an academic press or more commercial?

DK: I would like to go with a reputable Catholic academic press that's not too elitist, but that, on the other hand, isn't too pedestrian. That's sort of in the middle. One like Image comes to mind; New Directions comes to mind; those are reputable publishers that publish good middle ground.

TS: Well, it sounds like you've got that figured out. There was a time when the Boyer model was pretty much the Bible on this campus. What's your perception now in

the English department? Are we moving beyond Boyer or is the Boyer model of scholarship still applicable?

DK: I liked the Boyer model very much.

TS: I do too.

DK: I miss it. I think it probably is on its way out, and I think we're at a stage not so much in the department, but maybe in the college and at the university level, where in aspiring to do greater things, we may, perhaps, not be thinking everything through clearly. We may be discarding some of our old values that really made the institution what it is in favor of these things that we think are grander and bigger. That's not necessarily true. There's a tendency in scholarship, especially, to think the more esoteric or obtuse or vague something is, the more complicated it is, the better it must be. I don't put any stock in that notion at all. I have absolutely no interest in an English professor who can't write good, clear, English prose, but, unfortunately, so much of what passes for scholarship is not good, clear, English prose. I think that there was a time when we had a lot of just good sense on this campus about what constituted good scholarship, and there was a good deal of collegiality and support for your peers' accomplishments. There still is, but the expectations and the definitions of what constitutes good scholarship have changed. Yet, I don't think anybody really knows what they are. I'll give you an example. Our former dean wrote in my post-tenure review analysis that he felt that I was doing fine in everything. In fact, I've exceeded expectations in almost every category for five years. But he wrote that I needed to craft a more robust research agenda. Well, I don't know what that means. It sounded like I ought to go out and chop wood. I think I've been very robust, but it's not necessarily the kinds of things that people view, as you've said, traditional scholarship. I think more than ever it's important to engage with the public. You see these pieces in the *Georgia Bulletin*, and then the lectures—I give lectures all over the place. My name is identified with Kennesaw State University, and so people in the public say, "Here's a professor . . ."

TS: And he seems halfway normal.

DK: "Who not only seems halfway normal, but is out here doing something." That's crucial. But, sometimes, if you get four or five academics alone in a room together, they change; they turn into vipers.

TS: Are you talking about tenure and promotion committees?

DK: Exactly. I'll never understand it. The thought of going on for full professor terrifies me. It fills me with anxiety.

TS: In one sense you have nothing to lose.

- DK: Well, that's what my chair says, but I think we make it hard for people to succeed—harder than necessary.
- TS: I understand. I think that what you're describing is a situation where people who may consider themselves to be very liberal, have a very conservative, uncreative, non-creative view of scholarship. They're thinking conservatively in the sense that they want to go back to where you gain your reputation by writing something that nobody's going to read except, hopefully, five scholars in the field and the few unfortunate graduate students that are forced to read all this stuff. I spoke to the Smyrna Historical Society last night, and, to me, getting out and interacting with the public is far more important than spending a lot of time writing something that nobody's going to read.
- DK: I agree with you. So every month I have some time committed to something public. I've always been that way. To me, that really should be at the heart of what a university does. It shouldn't be something that we have to speak about in jingoistic terms. It ought to be something that we just do, and we naturally reward and recognize.
- TS: Yes. We're on the same wave length on that, I think. You've got a long perspective from childhood through a career at Kennesaw now for twenty years, about change over your lifetime at Kennesaw. We're not the wide open spaces with lots of woods that we were when you were growing up. Obviously, we've got a lot more buildings on our campus that we used to have. There are some things that are really, really, obvious, but how would you describe the change? Do you see it as a positive or a negative on the whole, the way that we've changed?
- DK: I think there have been some positives. I think the overall quality of the traditional-aged student has improved, but at the same time I miss those nontraditional adult learners, and I'm afraid they're gone. I only occasionally now have students like that, and I miss them. I miss that kind of environment.
- TS: Where have they gone?
- DK: I don't know where they've gone.
- TS: I was thinking that maybe they were just going down percentage-wise, but I didn't have the sense that they're not in the classroom.
- DK: I don't see them, no.
- TS: I think I maybe had a skewed view because in the courses I taught there were so many history education students.

DK: I think it's a positive that we have so many new graduate programs. I'm very fortunate to teach in the Master in American Studies program. That's a good program. I'm pleased to be associated with it. I'm thrilled that we have so many minors now. The minor in Religious Studies, which I teach in, the minor in Film Studies—these are good liberal arts minors that we need to keep. At the same time—and this is not a problem that's unique to Kennesaw State—this is a national problem: the emphasis upon the liberal arts seems to be lessening every year. The value of a true liberal arts education seems to be less meaningful to students year by year. So, that, to me, is a sad change. But, again, that's a change that is national; that's not unique to us. It's discouraging sometimes to see the enormous growth in the physical plant, the buildings, the amenities, but yet be reminded constantly that we are below national averages in salaries for faculty—that in spite of all the talk about equity and compression, very little has actually been done. It's discouraging to weigh all of these expensive projects on the one hand that do build a vibrant campus against a faculty work force that is undervalued and underpaid. That may not be the fault of the institution. I know we're a state institution. But to go without a pay adjustment for seven years is difficult.

TS: Is that where we are now?

DK: Yes, Fiscal Year 2013, no raises. That'll be seven years for me, and I have a growing family, so that's difficult.

TS: How many children do you have?

DK: Two children. Two children who were not here seven years ago, and a house that wasn't here seven years ago.

TS: Do they come out to campus?

DK: Oh, they come out to campus all the time.

TS: What do they think of the campus?

DK: Well, they think that it's quite fun to kick soccer balls up and down the English department hallways and to watch movies. I set my four-year old up in an empty classroom across the hall from my office and show him movies. He thinks that's great. Other changes: we've become much more accountable than we ever were in the past, but I think we've gotten to the point where the accountability measures are suffocating. FPA's, ARD's

TS: You spend more time explaining what you're doing than actually doing it.

DK: That's right. Well put. I'm very disappointed in the movement away from valid evaluations of teaching. I think the digital measures concept [where students

evaluate instructors online rather than filling out evaluations in the classroom] is a mistake. Only 37 percent, on average, complete evaluations. It's not fair for faculty members who have to prove themselves in the old evaluation model. We know we have faculty members coming along through the ranks who, in essence, aren't being as fully evaluated as we were fifteen, twenty years ago. But more important than that, the students aren't really telling us what we need to do to improve, and they're not really telling us what we're doing well. If less than half participate, I just don't see what those things matter.

TS: I was getting out about the time that was coming in, and I was wondering how that was going to work with instead of doing the evaluations on the last day of class or whatever, you have them do it online, if they feel like it.

DK: Another change—it's been so nice to talk with you because you're a familiar face. I don't want to grouse and sound like a grouchy old man, but it used to be that you knew people, not just in your department or in your college, but you knew people across the university. I can't even conceive of knowing somebody closely in the College of Science and Mathematics or the College of the Arts. We've gotten really, really big. Even my own department, English, is just huge. There's no way to know everyone. So I miss that. But with all of these pros and cons the thing that remains constant is the classroom and what can happen between an engaged and motivated teacher and a curious student. It's a beautiful thing, and it's universal, and that's what really matters. Long after the gloss has worn off of all the new, that thing, I think, will remain fixed.

TS: Do you envision spending the rest of your career at Kennesaw?

DK: I often think about it. I think every faculty member goes through a period in his or her career where you start to question. You're at mid-career. Is this really all there is? Is this all I want to do? What else is out there?

TS: I noticed that you were doing some adjunct teaching at a Jesuit institution.

DK: Which has been rewarding.

TS: Where is that located?

DK: Well Spring Hill is the college you're referring to, and it's in Mobile, Alabama. It's a very old institution.

TS: Do you take off the summer and go down there?

DK: I have. Two summers ago I gave a colloquium there, and I've taught there briefly, but I've taught mainly in their satellite programs. They have a satellite program in Birmingham and then one here in Atlanta. That's been a nice way to

- address my Catholic interests in an explicitly Catholic way, in a way that I can't do here in a public institution.
- TS: You are the advisor to the Catholic Student Association; is that what it's called?
- DK: Yes, Catholic Student Union.
- TS: You've been the advisor almost since the beginning.
- DK: Since the very beginning. I'm very happy at Kennesaw State because of what I've said—the teaching. But even that has changed. The way students have changed, the way they learn, the way they communicate, has changed, and that's a challenge. It's almost like I feel like Henry Adams sometimes—educated in one century, but forced to live in another. That's true.
- TS: Pretty much. Do you ever think about administration? Your mother went that route.
- DK: Oh, no, I don't see myself as an administrator. I had a taste of that when I directed the Learning Communities program, and that was enough for me.
- TS: Good for you on that too! [laughter]
- DK: No, I love to teach too much.
- TS: But you're saying it's different.
- DK: It's different in terms of the way your students communicate. Social media has changed so much of what we do. This goes beyond the ways that people communicate. It gets into, really, how people relate to one another. We've become in many ways isolated. If there's one thing that a good college course is, it can reaffirm for people the value of personal communication, interaction, the value of face to face, human contact. People need to hear an articulate speaker; people need to listen.
- TS: Are you saying it's hard to have a class discussion nowadays?
- DK: It's gotten harder. I confess, for me, it's gotten harder just because of my own physical limitations. I've had a hearing loss, a progressive hearing loss, since I was nineteen.
- TS: Did you go to too many rock concerts?
- DK: No, I have a disease called Meniere's disease. For many years it was isolated in just one ear, my left ear, but about seven or eight years ago, it moved into the other ear, so I now have to wear a hearing aid in my better ear, the right ear, and

some days it's difficult. It's the kind of illness where you have good days and bad days. Today's a pretty good day. But on a bad day it's a real challenge to go into a vast auditorium and try to be personal and intimate with students and lead discussions. But I do it. I walk right up to them. I don't care if I have to lean right down. I will not let the room be silent. But that's a real challenge.

TS: How big are your classes?

DK: Well, for the most part, the film classes are typically around thirty or thirty-five—English twenty-five to thirty—so they're not that big. But the room in which we teach the film courses is a big, big room, and voices can get lost or they can carry. I've become a master at knowing where to stand in Social Science room 1019. But that's difficult.

TS: That's a horrible room to teach in anyway.

DK: It's not easy to lead an academic life when you have small children, and I had small children at a pretty old age. I'm forty-four, soon to be forty-five years old, and I have a four year old and a fourteen-month old baby. I'm fully involved in parenting them, so it's tough to juggle. I have a new respect for all those nontraditional students with families that used to be so numerous here. I have a new, deep respect for them—and for anybody, particularly women, who traditionally have had to juggle careers and home. I have a completely new respect for just how challenging that is.

TS: I guess part of why I asked the question I did earlier is that I hope that we're not doing anything on our campus nowadays that turns them off, so that they don't want to come here any more. Have we grown too big?

DK: I don't have any scientific data, but just speaking in an anecdotal way, I don't see these nontraditional students much any more. And the biggest problem we face, I think, is how do you deal with disengaged students? How do we get back to a place where students see that a college education is not necessarily something you have to do. It should be something you want to do. How do we make a real education appealing? But we're so practical now, so pragmatic, and everything has to be instantaneous.

TS: What have we not talked about that we should have?

DK: I think we've had a long conversation.

TS: Anything you want to say about Kennesaw?

DK: I would like to say, I think I've had a unique experience here in that I literally grew up on this campus. Technically, I was a grounds crew member here before I was anything else. So I wonder if I could add that to my years of service.

TS: You worked on the grounds crew?

DK: I worked on the grounds crew with my brother for three summers. If you look at the Joe Mack Wilson building and wonder why the shrubbery in front of the building is crooked, it is because my brother and I planted it!

TS: What's your brother's name?

DK: My brother's name is Allen. Allen and I worked on the grounds crew.

TS: How about that. And you planted crooked bushes.

DK: And here I am as a tenured associate professor. I never intended to stay that long; it just happened that way. Of course, my mother has such a legacy here, but I've never had to be in her shadow. I've been able to have an identity of my own, a place of my own. And she and I have very consciously made that happen. She'll be gone soon from Kennesaw. She keeps saying she's going to leave, but she never does.

TS: She's doing part-time work, isn't she, for the Athletic department now?

DK: Yes. But I have a lot more to do here, a lot more that I would like to be able to do here. I'm glad to have the perspective that so many people don't have on what we used to be. That's fundamental to me. I guess it's just part of who I am, but a sense of place is very deep in me, and I'm glad that I know, as I said, what we once were. It's important not to lose sight of that.

TS: I didn't ask you what it was like to teach in a department with people that you knew when you were a child.

DK: It was fun. They've all retired now, although occasionally a few of them come back to teach part-time. But it was fun. It was nice to be treated as a colleague.

TS: How long did it take to call them by their first names?

DK: It didn't take that long, really.

TS: Well, I'm about out of questions unless you've got anything you want to add. Seems like there's something else you're trying to say.

DK: Well, this is not so much a matter for the record. This is just personal, but it's true when you've been at a place for twenty years, and you're at the middle of your life, I feel like, sometimes, professionalism among faculty is not what it once was. I can remember for example when Dean [George H.] Beggs was here. A male faculty member did not come to work without a jacket and a tie. I can

remember one time in the men's restroom with George Beggs, he and I were in there together, and we were washing our hands and making conversation, and he said, "You need to straighten up that tie"—which I did immediately because you listened to what he said. And it wasn't just a matter of dress, which I miss by the way—I wish that the days of the jacket and a tie would come back. Now, see, for you, they've never left.

TS: No.

DK: I wish they would come back. But I wish along with them would come a desire for inquiry and an urge to be meditative and thoughtful, collegial. I really miss that kind of decorum and demeanor with which people used to conduct business.

TS: I always supported Beggs in the dress code because I thought people dress for things that they think are important. I mean, you put on a suit to go to your wedding. People don't necessarily do it to go to church anymore, but you do dress for the things that you think are really important. To me it's a way of conveying in the classroom, I think it's important what we're doing here today.

DK: I agree with you. I wish that would come back. It seems like a small thing, but as I said, it might mask a deeper problem. There have been other changes that I think I would like to reflect upon a bit more before I talk about them.

TS: I think it is good that we are talking about issues and attitudes. We're not really talking about personalities, or not blaming anybody for this or that, but I think what you're talking about is really a critique of the culture on the campus and how that's changed.

DK: That's right. I think that's probably enough for now. I might have something I can add later.

TS: That's fine. We'll stop the tape at this point then.

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