

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH PAMELA BURRESS COLE

CONDUCTED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT and DEDE YOW

EDITED AND INDEXED BY JAN HEIDRICH-RICE

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TS: Pam, why don't we just begin by asking you when and where you were born, where you went to school, and where you grew up?

PC: I grew up in Whitewood, Virginia, a coal mining community, a place you won't find on most maps. It was a logging community—named after the white oaks that grew there—before it became a coal mining town. The oaks were snow white when they cut them, so they named the area Whitewood. I lived my entire life there. Even after I graduated from college with a teaching degree in English, I went back and taught in my old school.

TS: That's right; I remember seeing that. I was wondering where Whitewood was.

DY: Whitewood Elementary and Whitewood High School.

PC: When I went to school, the elementary and high schools were combined; they were in the same building. When I went back to teach, there were two separate administrations, but we were all still in one building. Not long after I started, the county built a new building downriver for the high school, and I ended up moving down there to teach. So Mom and I taught in the same building for a while—she was an assistant principal in the elementary. That was kind of cool—I miss working with her. She doesn't know it, but I learned most everything I know about relating to kids from her.

TS: Were you like Betty [L.] Siegel, a coal miner's daughter?

PC: I was a coal miner's granddaughter—my dad's dad became a miner when he was about 12—he grew up during the Depression. And his mother made him leave home and find work; she did it because she couldn't feed him—there were a lot of families who did that back then. But my dad was a trucker; he drove a coal truck his whole life. He watched the mines destroy my grandfather, and I don't think he wanted that for himself. I grew up *really* poor, but I didn't know it. Everybody was poor; I mean *nobody* had anything. But the good thing about growing up like that is you don't know to want anything. (Laugh). But in a way, I realized there were things I didn't have. I remember learning to read with *Dick and Jane*. I remember Jane wore black patent leather shoes with frilly white socks, and she would walk down a paved driveway to a mailbox! Well, we didn't have mailboxes, much less paved driveways—we parked in dirt—mud when it was raining and walked up the train tracks to the post office. And Dick and Jane had a

- garage, and, of course, I'd never seen a garage. I remember envying that lifestyle as a kid when I read about it in stories, and I wondered if I could ever have a mailbox. I was in my mid-thirties before I had a house that had a mailbox. You're not going to believe this, but I spent \$300 on my first mailbox. That was crazy, but I had the prettiest mailbox on the street.
- DY: And now, culturally, I guess, the status is such that if you don't have a mailbox, and you don't have a house on the street, now that's . . .
- PC: Yes.
- TS: I hadn't thought about that, but Dick and Jane may have been kind of a suburban model before any of us lived in suburbs, at least in this part of the country.
- PC: I think so, too. I remember how much I wished I could live like that and how much I envied those kids when I read those stories. My dad always came home coated in coal dust—though he drove a truck, he had to load it, so he was under the conveyor belts all day and came home looking like he had been inside the mine. I remember Jane's dad and I just wondered why *my* dad came home dirty. [laugh].
- TS: I had never thought about them in that light, but that's interesting.
- PC: Of course, Jane had the cat, and Dick had the dog—you know, the typical stereotype. And I never could have a cat; my dad just hated cats, my mom, too. I remember just thinking, "I wish I could have a cat." I know I never asked because I know it was out of the question. Of course, I have one now. We had a number of dogs, though, and that was probably cultural. A lot of people who grew up in the mountains had dogs.
- TS: We're finding a lot of the people that we've been interviewing—and we've done thirty-two or thirty-four [interviews] now with KSU faculty members—have really come out of modest, non-academic type backgrounds and yet ended up in college. I'm just wondering now if that's something that's unique about Kennesaw or if it's typical of faculty across the country maybe.
- PC: I'm not sure but I'm guessing it's unique to Kennesaw and other similar schools. Wouldn't it be interesting to study urban universities and other types of universities and see? A lot of people have asked me, "How did you get out of that lifestyle?" And I have to go back to my mom and dad and their work ethic and determination. Mom quit school but returned to finish high school after my older brother and I entered elementary school. She rode the bus with us to school, so she was a nontraditional student, like many here. And after that, she went on to college. She had to drive a long way to college—like two hours one way and two hours back, and that was during the gas shortage in the early '70s. I often think back on those years, how hard they were for all of us—I had three pairs of pants to my name, and my mom didn't have a coat and no decent clothes. When I see older students coming back to Kennesaw, my heart just opens to them because I

know for some of them coming to Kennesaw isn't a second chance, it's a first. They never got the first shot at a decent life. And I'll do everything I can to help people like that. So I think a lot of faculty here are drawn to the same thing.

TS: Where did your mom go to college?

PC: She started at the same community college that I attended—Southwest Virginia Community College, but she had to drive to Pikeville College in Kentucky to finish her teaching degree. I remember many times I'd hear her crying, and my dad would go into the bedroom where she was and say, "Hang in there, Daisy; just one more week"—or one more semester, or one more paper, etc. He was *so* behind her. I forget that sometimes and I shouldn't. Somehow they both knew if they wanted out of poverty, education was the door. I've never asked Mom this, but I think she wanted an education so badly because she grew up so poor. She walked to a one-room school house, and she wore homemade clothes made from feed sacks—grain for animals. There were a lot of town kids in her school who had "store-bought" clothing and their families had money, and they made fun of Mom and her friends because of how they dressed and what they brought to school to eat—homemade biscuits instead of white bread. . . . Wouldn't most of us die for that now? Anyway, I think she just didn't want to be small anymore. I think she wanted to be "something," and I think she knew education was the way. She was determined that we wouldn't be like that.

TS: Did you have electricity in the house?

PC: Yes, we did have electricity. Earlier we were talking about the connection between faculty like me and nontraditional students. I love Kennesaw because of the nontraditional students. That's my mother because I sat in college classes with her sometimes when I was really small. So I see these people coming back for second careers or these mothers and fathers coming back who don't have a lot, but they know they want more for themselves; they want more for their children. And they're torn between spending time with their kids and buying their kids things and spending time on school work and money on college expenses. I have such a passion for people in that situation because I grew up in it. I can still see my mom crying in the bedroom because she was tired and was ready to give up, but she wanted more for us. And Dad did too. Never once did he try to get her to stop. He pushed her the entire way. I think that's one reason—the main reason actually—I like Kennesaw, and I think there are probably other people who like it for that reason, too.

TS: You said your mother's name is Daisy?

PC: Daisy.

TS: What about your father?

PC: Jimmy.

TS: And the last name?

PC: Burress.

DY: Have you and Dr. Siegel talked about your [mutual experiences in southern Appalachia]?

PC: Some. Not a lot. But we connect because of our Appalachian backgrounds. The connection is difficult to explain because there's just something you feel when you meet people who grew up there, and I've never found good words for it. We hired this new lady last year—Barbara Salyer—and the day I learned she grew up a couple of hours near me, we just reached out and grabbed each other's hands. It's an emotional connection. It has a lot to do with understanding the difficulty you went through in surviving that world and moving out of it. And part of it is about sense of place. You know no one else will understand it, no matter how much they read or try to learn about it. And there's a piece of that life you hold dear to your heart—deep inside and it's bittersweet.

DY: I'm the point person for a conference Dr Siegel wants to hold called *Appalachian Women, Vein of Iron*. Your story that you just told is the kind of story that she was telling a group recently. This has been a passion of hers. She's ready to retire, and storytelling is such a key element.

PC: That's something I would like to attend.

TS: When did you graduate from high school?

PC: I graduated in '78.

TS: So you're growing up in the '60s and '70s.

PC: Yes. I grew up during the coal boom; we didn't have much else.

TS: That area was about as depressed as you could get.

PC: Even more so now. But we didn't know it. [chuckle]

TS: High unemployment and so on, I guess.

PC: Unemployment wasn't a big issue when I was growing up because of the coal boom. Choice was the issue, particularly for women. There wasn't, and still isn't, anything back there except mining. As I entered college and left home, unemployment was becoming a huge concern.

TS: Okay, your parents' inspiration then is why you didn't have any choice about going to college when you got out of high school.

PC: Yes. There's a story I tell quite a bit about that. A lot of people say, "Why or how did you get a doctorate degree?" I remember a traveling salesman came around; he was selling *World Book* encyclopedias. I don't know if you all lived in areas where they used to do that.

TS: Oh, yes.

DY: We had a set in our house, too, Pam.

PC: This encyclopedia salesman came around. We didn't have very many books in the house at all, and these books were in color— this was a big deal. You could buy them on "time"—credit. So my mom paid a few dollars a month. So she got a complete set of encyclopedias; and we spent weeks just devouring them. I remember sitting at the table when we first got them, and I decided I'm going to read these, front to back starting with **A** because I didn't want to miss anything, and Mom was looking at them with me. I remember we were in the **A** encyclopedia, and I was so taken by the slick paper and the color photos and everything. We came to "Academic Regalia," and there were the bachelor robes, which were black, and I asked "What are those?" And she told me. And then we turned a page and there were the colorful doctorate robes, long sleeves, and all the hoods and everything, and I said, "Well, that's what I'm getting!" Prettier. Right? And my mom said, "You can't wear that." And I was like, "Why?" And she said something like, "Those are for doctors, for men."

TS: Oh.

PC: You know she was just doing her culture. That's how she was raised, and she didn't see anything beyond it. It just wasn't possible for her at that time. I was so stubborn, so I thought, "Yes, I will. Nobody can tell me I can't have one because I'm a girl." That stayed with me; it was with me all the way through my childhood, all the way through high school and college. I didn't know what kind of doctor I wanted to be. But that feeling of unfairness drove me all the way. Mom laughs about it today.

TS: Does your mom still work?

PC: She does. She's still teaching. She's a reading specialist, which is kind of interesting because I'm in reading, too. But she's in elementary school, and I'm middle/secondary. She's been an assistant principal, a reading specialist, and a librarian, a fourth-grade teacher and a guidance counselor, and she's endorsed in all those areas.

DY: She's one we need to have come down for our conference and tell her story.

PC: She has a lot of stories; she can tell some great ones.

DY: I'll bet she does.

PC: Just wonderful stories of her parents. They would go off to church, and the older kids would be left to baby-sit. If anyone misbehaved, they put him in a sack, set him beside the door with the top tied. I mean, she has lots of really funny, silly stories. Today we would call some of those things child abuse. [laughter]

DY: Clearly your mother was a real important mentor. What about teachers; did you have any teachers that were mentors?

PC: Not really. The educational system was so poor, really pathetic. I started at a community college. That was because of money, number one; and number two, growing up the way I did, we didn't know there was a difference between community colleges and research universities; in fact, I probably didn't even know that term—*research university*. The community college was close by, and, of course, the tuition was cheap; you didn't have to worry about going away and paying room and board. So I started there, and I'm glad I did. I wouldn't have made it in a four-year school because I didn't have the social skills or the academic background. I had a friend who transferred into our high school and graduated two years early. He went to that community college with me, and if it were not for him helping me through freshman composition—of all things—I wouldn't have made it.

TS: What was his name?

PC: Jimmy Ward.

TS: What was the name of the school?

PC: Southwest Virginia Community College.

DY: And you went back and taught there, too?

PC: Well, I worked part time for them.

DY: Yes, I saw adjunct on your vita.

TS: Then you went to Emory and Henry [College], and that's a lot more prestigious.

PC: It's a prestigious little private school. Again, we didn't know it was prestigious. It's kind of funny. [Recently] I was talking to my mom about my son going to college because he's a junior [in high school], and he's starting to think about where he wants to go. He wants to go out of state, and I said, "Knowing Taylor's personality—he's so into liberal arts—he'd like Emory and Henry." He loves history and says he wants to be a history professor. So we were talking maybe he could go to Emory and Henry. And I looked online at the tuition, and the tuition's like \$20,000 a semester! Tuition alone!

TS: Good night. How did you get in there?

PC: Well, I got in because of my GPA. I was valedictorian in my high school but that doesn't mean anything. What I remember the most about my high school classes is sitting around talking and joking with the teachers when we should have been covering material. Of course, you couldn't have told me that then. I had one or two teachers who actually taught—like my government teacher, Miss Severt; and my science and math teachers, Ron Compton and Ron Childress, but I didn't appreciate them. I was so conditioned to doing nothing that I resented the few who wanted me to learn. For the most part, we weren't forced to do anything. As a senior we were allowed to substitute speech for senior English. I did that, and all we did except socialize was memorize one short poem and recite it before the class. Honestly. That's it for the entire year. I would get my freshman comp essays back at the community college with C's and D's on them, and I didn't know what to do. So my friend Jimmy taught me how to write an essay; he taught me how to do the five-paragraph theme. Nobody had ever taught me that. He knew how to do it, but he transferred to Whitewood from another school.

I grew some at the community college and kept my GPA in an acceptable range, so I was able to transfer from there, and my grandparents helped pay my tuition at Emory and Henry. Of course, it was not as expensive back then. I want to say, too, that the thought never occurred to me that I wouldn't get in to a college. We just didn't know how things worked. When my grandmother died, I was at my grandfather's and he was giving me some of her jewelry, and he was worried about money, so I told him I was almost finished school and I'd start paying him back soon. He wouldn't hear of it. He told me I did what he had always wanted to do and that was go to school. He went to the sixth grade and had to quit and find work because he was a child of the Depression. He was a child coal miner.

TS: Which grandparents are these?

PC: My dad's parents.

TS: How did they have the money to pay that kind of tuition?

PC: Like I said, it wasn't that expensive back then, but I suppose for the time it was still rather expensive. I got some assistance from the college, and my grandparents had a little money, but my dad wouldn't let them know how bad off we were. So they didn't help us much with day-to-day things. They owned some land and received coal royalties. They had a little money but could have been wealthy, but they were one of the poor families that let the coal companies take advantage of them by paying as little for the coal as possible. They weren't educated and didn't know they could have gotten a LOT more. But they got enough that they could live okay, and my grandfather received black lung and social security benefits. So they had a little bit of money, and they helped. And they didn't have any debt to worry about.

TS: They were Burreesses, obviously.

- PC: Yes. My grandfather's name was Hobert, and my grandmother's name was Trula B. They both passed away a long time ago.
- DY: What about your mother's parents? Are they gone, too?
- PC: They're all gone. Mom's parents were wonderful people and had wonderful values, but education just never found its way into their lives. And maybe that's not a fair statement because I didn't know them as well. I didn't live close to them. I lived closer to my dad's family, so they influenced me more growing up.
- TS: Well, you got through Emory and Henry and then went to . . .
- PC: I still saw that doctoral robe that I didn't have.
- DY: You liked those colors!
- TS: So it looks like you went straight to graduate school from there at Radford [University]?
- PC: Pretty much. I actually was teaching full time, but I started grad school and did it course by course the way a lot of teachers do. That wasn't enough. I wanted to be at the top, earn the highest degree I could. I just never liked being outdone, so I went on to Virginia Tech [Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University].
- DY: What was your master's in?
- PC: English.
- TS: Both your bachelor's and your master's were in English, which I guess makes sense for you, doing adolescent literature now. So then you went on to Virginia Tech.
- PC: I went on to Virginia Tech. At the time I thought I wanted to teach freshman comp at a community college. Again, my world wasn't very big. And there's nothing wrong with doing that; it's an important responsibility, but I didn't really know there were other possibilities. I didn't see other opportunities because I went back and worked where I grew up. I didn't travel; I lived in this microcosmic world. Earlier you asked if a teacher influenced me and I said no, not in public schools. But I had some important mentors in my doctoral program. One was my advisor, Pat [Patricia P.] Kelly. She grew up in a similar fashion, perhaps not as bad, but she knew my life. She picked up the dialect immediately. She knew my background, and I think she knew that I needed support that other students didn't need. She was very instrumental. She helped me catch up academically and socially, but she didn't make me feel inferior.
- TS: Was your dialect a liability in terms of academics?

PC: Absolutely! When I look back on a lot of my experiences, particularly at Radford, I know the way I spoke influenced my grades in graduate school. I caught on to writing fairly fast, but I kept getting **Bs** in English classes at Radford, but there were so few marks on my paper. I could never figure out what I needed to do to get the **A**. For a while, I felt I was just dumber than everyone else. But later, I realized my teachers were being influenced by my dialect. I went back and played videotapes of me talking and, like wow, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I just didn't know I sounded so dumb.

I didn't change my dialect a whole lot. But I did work on things that I felt would make people wonder whether I was very bright. Rather than saying *tater*, I learned *potato* and things like that. *Winder* became *window*. So I worked on some things, but I didn't try to change every single thing. I don't think I could because language is so visceral. So I do think language played a very crucial role in the grades I earned, particularly in my master's program, not so much in my doctorate program because my professors there were so open to diversity. They weren't just open to it, they had a passion for equality and helping people like me. They understood the politics of literacy, language, linguistics, and so forth. They not only appreciated and understood, but they taught others to understand us, too. When I reflect on my experiences at Virginia Tech, I only wish other parts of my life/education had been as positive. It was really a remarkable time in my life.

DY: We talk about how dialect is perceived by others in class when we read stories that contain dialect.

PC: David [M] Johnson [KSU faculty member] is a linguist. I think he would say there's no such thing as a language with no dialect. There's the so-called standard, which isn't really standard.

DY: It doesn't exist.

PC: Exactly.

TS: Jimmy Carter, when he was running for president, said he was the first presidential candidate—or maybe the first president ever—who didn't have an accent.

PC: That was so great! My son and I went to Plains, Georgia, this summer and saw his house and everything. It's amazing to know he returned to the exact same house he lived in before he was president. He's one of the most selfless humans on earth. Just an amazing human being.

TS: It's unusual.

PC: It's a plain ranch house.

TS: So you went through Virginia Tech. Why don't you say a little bit more about Pat Kelly and how she was a mentor.

PC: Well, like I said, when I finished my bachelor's, I didn't [yet] get a wake-up call about my dialect. I think I didn't notice it because I was a commuter student and didn't socially interact whatsoever. When I started the doctoral program at VT, they had a residency requirement, and the professors created—and I often wonder if they know how wonderful this was—a kind of family unit with the students. Classes were small; we had a lot of discussion and group work, and faculty joined us in so much. They ate with us; took us to conferences, presented with us, wrote with us, and so on. It was impossible to be in that program and not be connected to everyone—faculty and students both. You had to be on campus more, so I was immersed in a strong academic environment. I started noticing things about myself. People would ask me, “Where are you from?” And they would make comments about the way I spoke. And I couldn't “hear” what they heard. I mean I couldn't hear that I was different. And they would talk about things that I didn't know about, and I started noticing vocabulary and cultural things, like food. I remember hearing *calzone* and wondering what the heck that was [laughter]. I started feeling uncomfortable; I even started hating my past, my childhood, my family to a certain degree, and the community I grew up in. And I found myself apologizing for my life. I would go home, and I would see poverty, something I didn't see it before; I started hearing the dialect and I hated it. I felt embarrassed about the way I grew up. I'd play videotapes of me playing with my son, and I'd just cringe. So I closed off and didn't talk about my background. I told as little as I could get by with. I struggled with that for a good while. Pat was always there to tell me it's okay, you know—that there are things I would decide I needed to change.

I remember my preliminary program interview. I had to apply, take a few classes, and then do a formal interview before being officially accepted into the doctoral program. Pat chaired the committee. I got in there and froze. They asked me such general things like, “Where do you see yourself in five years? What do you want to do with this degree?” I had lived such a microcosmic life, I couldn't answer. The only real answer I had, and I didn't think it was acceptable, was that I wanted to go as far as I could. Where I was going really didn't matter. And something told me that was a not-so-brilliant answer, so I literally froze and couldn't get five or ten words out. Technically, I failed that interview. But Pat didn't let me fail; she took a chance on me. I'm not sure if I'd want to be a fly on the wall in that room after I walked out. [laughter] I'm sure they were taken back by my inability to answer such simple questions. But I didn't know what I could do with a doctorate degree. Here I was thirty years old and still that naïve about opportunity.

DY: She knew what had happened to you.

PC: She knew *exactly* what had happened. So she just told everybody, “This lady can do this.” Well, no, maybe she said, “I *think* this lady can do this.” I'm not sure. Anyway, she gave me the chance and I'll always owe her.

DY: You talked earlier about the cultural change when you went to Virginia Tech—that the culture was different.

PC: I was scared to death.

DY: How was it different? A bigger place?

PC: Bigger. Open-minded. The people were more educated; they had traveled; they knew worldly things that I didn't know. I'd never been in a place where I felt inferior intellectually, and I was beginning to realize my limitations. When you grow up in a limited area, there are a lot of things you don't know. I didn't realize that I was prejudiced; I didn't realize I was racist. But I was. I learned that about myself by interacting with people, and the realization created a great deal of cultural tension. I struggled so much when I went back home. Like someone would ask, "Why are you talking that way?" And I would get into racial issues. I would hear people make racial statements, subtle statements, and I knew they were just like me. They didn't understand what they were doing. I hate racism; I detest racism. But I also understand it, particularly its subtleties, and I think those subtleties are more dangerous than blatant acts. Racism comes out of hatred, but it's grounded even deeper in ignorance—and that's the element we have to fix if we're ever going to live in a world free from bigotry.

You know, shortly after Hurricane Katrina [Hurricane Katrina that battered New Orleans and the coastal areas of Louisiana and Mississippi in 2005] a landlord was on the news because a black man had opened his apartment to a lot of family and friends. Apparently the contract spelled out how many people could live in a unit, and the landlord was preparing to evict the family. A news reporter asked, "Are you not being kind of hard on these people? This is a special situation." And he said, "Oh, I care about these people. I'm really concerned, but I'm not a warehouse." I thought, "You don't know what you said."

DY: He sure didn't.

PC: That's an example of a subtlety. And it's ignorance. He had no idea how awful that made him look. That's what I had to learn about my own family and what I had to learn about myself, too. You're just not aware of those kinds of things unless you're forced somehow to examine yourself. My family has changed because of me and to the better.

TS: Well, that area didn't have a lot of black people in it, did it?

PC: There were none. My school was 100 percent white. When I was in fourth grade, my Virginia history book described slavery as a wonderful thing. I still have the book. It says slaves were treated great. They were taken care of; they didn't desire anything. Everything was perfect in their lives. I believed it. There was nobody in class or in my life to tell me it was wrong. I remember that so clearly because I always loved the Civil War Era.

TS: I noticed that you also got a library media specialist degree from Clinch Valley College while you were teaching, I guess. Then there's eleven years between your master's and your Ph.D. Were you taking a course at a time, or did you just wait until late to go in the program?

PC: I waited. First of all, the library media specialist degree . . . I'm trying to think why I did that because I would never want to be a librarian. [laughter]

DY: It would isolate you from people too much.

PC: My mom got that degree with me. We are really close, though I don't see her much now. I was pregnant at the time. I knew I didn't want to stay in a high school classroom the rest of my life. So I was just searching for something that would get me, and Mom had just taken a job as a librarian and was getting certified. After getting the degree I even interviewed as a librarian for a federal correctional facility. After touring the place and learning that I'd remain in lock down with the prisoners when they had emergency situations, I said, "Not for me." [chuckle]

TS: You wanted out of the high school classroom?

PC: Yes. I was searching for an outlet. I knew I wanted a doctorate; like I said, I didn't know in what. I didn't know how to go about getting it. I remember when I went back to teach high school English, [my senior English teacher became] my colleague. Students made fun of her. It wasn't that she was elderly; it was that students thought she did weird things—like everything she owned she kept in a baggie. She kept pencils in a baggie, which you buy for a nickel and the nickel, of course, went into another baggie; she put our assignments in baggies, progress reports—then report cards—went into baggies. Everything in that woman's room was in a baggie, and kids found that funny. I remember saying that I was going to quit teaching when kids started making fun of me.

Well, when my former English teacher retired, I took over her responsibilities as senior class sponsor. One day I had to attend a county meeting, and the school hired her as my substitute. About midday I'm sitting in my car eating lunch before heading to the meeting, and I'm eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich—out of a baggie. I look over to my left and my former English teacher, now my substitute, was sitting in her car, eating *her* peanut butter sandwich out of a baggie. My brain did some really fast work because I realized right there: *Pam, if you don't do something right now, you are going to be here the rest of your life.* That was the pivotal event that made me realize I needed to make some phone calls, identify some options, if I wanted something different.

TS: Plus you needed that academic regalia. [chuckle] So you go to Virginia Tech, and you're still staying close to home; you haven't gone that far.

PC: Yes.

DY: Is that in Blacksburg?

PC: Blacksburg, Virginia, beautiful school. I remember the first time I drove into it, it was pouring rain, and I was absolutely scared to death. I didn't know that I had to allow time to park the car; not having been on a large university campus. I just thought you drove up to the building and walked in. [chuckle] The drive was 122 miles one way, and 122 miles back. I counted it off every time—and collected a few speeding tickets along the way.

DY: One of my best friends in graduate school was from Clinch Valley.

PC: Clinch Valley is a neat little school. It's actually a daughter school of UVA [University of Virginia].

DY: His family lived there in Clinch Valley.

TS: Well, you got a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction, so obviously you wanted to teach in college by that point.

PC: Again, I didn't really know. I didn't know what I could do with a doctorate in education. When I went to Pat Kelly, my advisor, I thought I would be teaching freshman comp. She just said, "Are you sure that's what you want?" So she opened up that whole world of teacher training and adolescent literature. I guess I had never thought that somebody had to train teachers. [laughter] I might have been very happy teaching freshman comp, but Pat opened other doors. She also helped me with my early publications. I hear a lot of faculty members who say, "I didn't really have a good mentor." I certainly did because she would take me to conferences with her and help me make political connections, introducing me to the key players in my field and so on. I remember the first book chapter I had published. She introduced me to the editor of the book, and she said, "Joan, I want to introduce you to Pam. You were telling me you wanted a chapter written on I don't have time to do it, but Pam can do a wonderful chapter for you." So it was that kind of thing that she did that was priceless.

TS: What was your dissertation?

PC: I did it on student self-assessment in writing—how students evaluate their own writing. [The title is "Portfolio Talk in a Sixth-Grade Writing Workshop."] It was quite interesting because some of the things that came out of it had to do with students' perceptions of themselves. Students who didn't have confidence tended to grade themselves harder, and kids who were a little arrogant and a little over confident would give themselves a higher grade than I would give them. I enjoyed it.

TS: Well, you had a child between the ages of zero and seven, I guess, while you were going through the Ph.D. program. That must have added to your time commitment as well.

PC: I was lucky in a lot of ways going through my doctorate program. I made what I think was a smart decision; I did the doctorate work before my son started school. He was a toddler. If I'd waited until he was older, I think it would have been harder for me; I think it would have taken longer. Maybe I wouldn't have done it when he was older, or maybe something would have made me stop. Who knows? But I was lucky, too, in that by that time my dad had retired, sold his business, and started college. He was sixty years old and entered community college and got his two-year certificate. So he became my baby-sitter.

DY: How lucky for your son.

PC: Oh, my gosh. They have a wonderful relationship, just an amazing relationship. It's changed as Taylor has turned into a teenager and we live farther away, but my dad saved my son—I'm a single mom, and Taylor so needed a male role model. Taylor knows my dad would be here in a heartbeat if he needed anything whatsoever. Also, as you all know, working on your doctorate can pull you away from your family; it is so consuming.

DY: It's pretty consuming.

PC: Yeah. My mother told me to get an hourglass. I don't know where she got the idea, but she told me to go get one of those hourglasses that will last for thirty minutes, and she said, "When you're working on your school work, tell Taylor that when the sand runs out, come and get you, and you all will do something." So I would give him the hourglass, and he would take it; I can see him in my head right now. I would give him the hourglass, and he would take it and put it beside his toys. The trick was I had to make sure when he brought it that I stopped immediately. It didn't matter what great idea was going, I had to stop immediately. And I did. That helped a lot. He would bring it to me—he's seventeen now—and the sand would be gone, and we'd go outside for a walk or bike ride or something.

DY: Good training for the classroom because you just really don't sustain a thought while you're in there. You have to be constantly responding to students.

TS: Well, it looks like you came straight to Kennesaw from your Ph.D.

PC: I did. I was lucky. I didn't know a lot about searching for different jobs and didn't know much about what higher education was like. I remember in my interview, Marj [Marjorie] Economopoulos was on the search team, and she asked what service I thought I could contribute to the college. I just blundered through the answer. I don't know what I said, but I was clueless. I remember thinking that I'll do whatever you tell me to do. [laughter] And I probably gave some answer like that, too, but I think they understood. They must have. They hired me.

DY: It's a good answer, too—"willing to work on anything"—because in 1995, that's when NCATE [National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education] hit, if I'm not mistaken.

- PC: Yes, and that's why I got hired—because of NCATE. The College of Education had some problems with NCATE, and one issue dealt with too many part-time faculty. So my position resulted from that.
- TS: What kind of teaching position were you really looking for?
- PC: I wanted to teach adolescent literature.
- TS: I mean, some people we've interviewed say, "Well, we were thinking about Research I or . . ."
- PC: That was another place where my advisor played such a critical role when I was finishing up. Though she never directly said it, I believe she was afraid I couldn't make it at a Research I because of my background. She wanted to see me successful, and she never out and said I couldn't make it there but she did say, "You don't want to go there . . ." I think she was afraid I'd fail." I know now I could have been successful at a Research I school. It would be interesting to know what she thinks.
- DY: Well . . .
- PC: So that was the decision I made, and it was the best decision in my life.
- TS: Did you perceive Kennesaw as a Research II at that time?
- PC: I did; that's how I saw it. I don't know if that's how Kennesaw saw itself? Probably not. But everything for me at that time was "bigger" than it was to most people.
- TS: I don't know. I guess it's really how you define those terms. At any rate, we've actually interviewed a number of people who've said what you said, that they really had a sense of inferiority or an inferiority complex. It's always surprised me because I've never perceived any of them as having that kind of feeling.
- PC: Yes. I think a lot of people ask those who have doctorate degrees why and how they got the degree. I think a high percentage of us would say we were always overachievers for some reason or another. I think some of us grew up feeling like we're the bottom rung on the ladder, and do or die, we're moving to the top. Poverty does that to people. We don't want to feel small anymore. I think many people like that end up with doctorate degrees. You have to have a lot of endurance, determination and will power to finish a doctorate, and when you're hungry to climb higher, you often don't stop until you reach the very top. Sports lovers say an athlete like that has the eye of the tiger. [laughter]
- DY: I do, too. You're proving yourself.
- PC: Yep. Absolutely. In terms of careers that can be great, but in our personal lives, that can be deadly.

- DY: But Tom's right; that's a theme that's running through. This is going to be so interesting when we go back and listen again and look again at these interviews [to analyze] what's made up this faculty. Of course, the people whom we've interviewed are winners of the Distinguished Awards.
- PC: Well, see, those winners are the university's overachievers. Maybe we never learn when to stop; maybe we're never good enough.
- TS: You came in '95, and I think our culture was changing on the campus at the time. I think of ourselves as a teaching and service-oriented institution at that time, but we're actually beginning to hire people that are going to do more and more research from '95 on, maybe even a few years before then.
- PC: That's interesting. Because I probably felt a stronger driver to prove myself in terms of research than the university required or asked for at that time . . . overachieving behavior, I suppose. So I probably did the "Research II" label on my own.
- DY: What changes strike you the most since you've been here?
- PC: About Kennesaw? Well, I think what Tom says. There is an evident move toward more scholarship. And there's a move toward trying to put us more on the map in relation to places like UGA, despite the difference in size and so forth. I'm not sure about this, and you two can correct me if I'm wrong. It could be where I work in the College of Education, but it feels like we're more diverse than we used to be. I know the College of Education has grown a great deal in that regards. More in terms of faculty than students.
- DY: I think we are. I think we're not as diverse as we want to be or should be, but I think that there's a consciousness there. I think Betty Siegel brought that to us.
- PC: Yes, and we've done a lot of work as a university, I think, with some of the international programs. I know in the College of Education we have a wonderful dean. Dean [Yiping] Wan is incredible; he cares about people, and he does everything he can to be fair. He's done a lot to promote connections across cultures. He has sent a number of our student teachers overseas to student teach. Some have gone to China, some went to Belize during their student teaching internship, and there are plans for other places. France, I think. So he's had a lot to do with increasing diversity in our college and to develop an awareness of global issues. And I know he has influenced other areas outside the College of Education as well.
- DY: Well, Pam, I think from having watched your career since you've been here and then looking at your vita, you've done a great deal yourself. You've worked with gay and lesbian issues, for example; I saw that on your presentations.
- PC: I've done some writing in that area. That's a huge interest to me for a couple of reasons. One, I mentioned my own prejudice, and I think we all still have

prejudice even when we're trying our best. Beliefs are so deeply ingrained and multi-layered; and if we care about people, about equality, then we do everything we can to identify and address our own issues. So part of my interest comes from my history, feeling I have to make up for some of my past ignorance.

The other element deals with my son. He went through several years of school and was just teased unmercifully. He's straight but kids assumed he was gay. Whether he is or isn't, of course, isn't the issue, the treatment is. I've seen the impact teasing has had on him and know he's one of many. I don't think kids, or a teacher for that matter, understand how just one simple remark can cut to the core. Homophobia a huge issue in our schools and we're side stepping it. I think that years down the road, we're going to look at gay and lesbian issues the same way that we look at civil rights. I think we will. And a lot of people will be embarrassed. And some will have regrets. Not all, but some.

DY: Well, I think silence is complicity, and I think when you're in a position as teachers are in the classroom, on any level to permit that kind of. . .

TS: Any time you let somebody bully somebody else, you're as guilty as those that are doing it.

PC: And bullying is not always overt. Bullying can occur in some of the most covert but insidious ways. Rachel Simmons wrote a book called *Odd Girl Out*. It's not really about gay and lesbian kids, but it is about bullying. Bullying is bullying whether someone is straight or gay, and she talks about the ways that girls bully and how girl bullying differs from that of boys. It's chilling because every single person—particularly women—can go back in school and see those behaviors and remember the kinds of things that teenage girls did that were just absolutely mean and nasty. You know, excluding people from groups. I mean, when a girl gets mad at another girl, her friends are “supposed” to be mad at her, too. That's how you prove friendship and loyalty. I mean a snowball effect just gets going. Not only do you exclude the person from the group, but you get everybody else in the group to exclude that person. And that's just one behavior. There are just so many. Bullying can be pretty nasty whether it's overt or whether it is hidden.

DY: Unfortunately, you can see that kind of behavior manifest on all levels. I mean, you can see adults behaving in that manner, too.

PC: Exactly.

TS: Is this something that we try to sensitize our students to that are in the middle school education program?

PC: Unfortunately, no, and we need to. Bullying in schools is pretty much defined as violent, aggressive behavior. That's one reason that in my multiple literacies class I cover gender issues. We talk about bullying and differences between boys and girls. I had a former student tell me about an experience involving some girls and one parent's concern over how her daughter was being treated. She said, “If I

hadn't taken your class, I would have just dismissed the parent." I would have thought the issues were trivial.

Exclusion is a powerful weapon for girls. Not letting someone sit down at a lunchroom table, giving someone's seat away or saving a seat for another individual and not letting a particular student have it. That's cruel and cold. The rejected student has to sit by herself (boys, too) because everyone at the table—in the group—has decided to dismiss you. So that person is isolated. While sitting alone to eat might not be a big deal for adults, it is a huge issue for adolescents. Man, I remember being excluded at school and I just hated lunch time. I hid in the bathroom because I didn't want anyone to know I was alone. I'd skip lunch.

So it's those kinds of things, and teachers aren't trained to identify and address those kinds of problems. If Susie's sitting by herself, teachers don't ask why. They're more focused on controlling the loud behavior—the kids who are throwing food, arguing and so on, or the potential fight brewing at Table 3. Even the adolescent eye roll that kids can do—you don't know what's behind that. You don't know when one kid gives it to another one what that's all about—but one thing is for certain, it's not good.

DY: What about just being a human being and understanding how people feel and seeing someone sitting by themselves? There's got to be something there. Do you want to deal with it or not. You can choose not to deal, but, Pam, thank you for making people conscious of that because once it's in your consciousness—once it's out there and somebody's talked about it—it's harder to ignore. Your little voice will get a little bit louder.

PC: Well thanks. Unfortunately, in some ways we have to grow into being human. Adolescence is such a miserable time.

DY: And the movies are helping, too. *Mean Girls*. That's really helping when it's out there in the popular culture.

PC: And it's not just girls with girls; a lot of boys in school struggle in a similar fashion. I mentioned my son earlier; he is a musician, and the kids who are musicians, the boys especially, are often considered nerds. Taylor loves cats, and he loves cooking. He's kind, gentle and can't stand to see people hurt. He loves words and language. And he hates sports. So a lot of his friends are girls, and he has, at times, been the kid who's been excluded. I've worked really hard to get him to understand that just because somebody's mad at your friend doesn't mean you have to be mad, too. I keep waiting for his friends to catch up. [laughter]

DY: We were talking about changes that you might have seen since you've come. How have you perceived the intellectual climate of this institution since you came in 1995? Have you found it to be receptive and nurturing, a solid, good intellectual climate? Have you seen it wax and wane?

PC: I've always felt since I first came that it's been a supportive community. I'm talking mostly about my college because that's where I have most of my connections. I do think that there's a hunger and a desire to bring in people who think differently. They can add another layer of intellect, another way of looking at education. We think a lot alike in our department. Sometimes that's good, and sometimes you need to be shaken up. You can be too "home grown." So I think that is something that I see, particularly in our college: a desire to bring in faculty who come from other universities, bigger places to help us with our doctoral programs. Also, I think we want to do more research, but because of the breakneck speed we spend on developing programs to keep up with the growth of the university, many who would like to do more research haven't been able to.

DY: Are you excited about the doctorate program?

PC: Oh, yes. I'm really excited about the doctorate program. I'm also a little scared, too, because I've never worked on a dissertation committee. I know there will be a lot of things that I can't do, but I'll have colleagues who can. I mean, Marj [Dr. Marj Economopoulos, Dept. Chair] wouldn't dream of having me teach an empirical research class. I'd be the laughing stock of the college. Gosh. Maybe I could take my Distinguished Teaching Award plaque into class with me. [chuckle]

DY: So you see it as just in your career, you've got a whole new phase coming in.

PC: Yes. I think there are a lot of really good teachers here. When I won the Distinguished Teaching Award, I said the committee was just tired of reading my stuff because I'd been up for so many things. Seriously, though, there are a lot of good teachers here, and any number of people deserve that award. I don't think there's any way of saying one person is the "best." But if I have a distinguishing trait, I think it's that I truly do enjoy learning from students. If you come in thinking you know everything and being defensive, you can't learn anything and you certainly can't appreciate the people you work with.

TS: I thought it was obvious from your resume that you want to create an environment in the classroom where everybody feels free to speak their mind or even contradict the teacher.

PC: Yes. That characteristic, I think, comes from experiences my mother had as a student. When she was doing her last two years of her bachelor's degree, she had to drive about six hours a day. And she was pregnant. I can't tell you how many stories she has of teachers telling her she didn't belong in school, that she belonged home. And lots of time she was shot down by the college professors—we have to remember she took the same background to college that I took, and she went to school during a time when cultural background wasn't recognized or valued. But I think a lot of people can relate to being shot down by a teacher at some point. If that didn't happen to us, we at least saw it happen to people around

- us. I know in any given classroom, I have students who know things I don't know and have experiences that can enrich the class. And I treasure that.
- TS: We're having fun, Dede and I, teaching a class together, Georgia History, Georgia Literature. We're using WebCT discussion groups this time where the students discuss some questions that we give them over the readings in the week before class. It's been really interesting to see them carry on their own discussions without us intruding.
- PC: You can learn a lot from that, can't you?
- TS: Absolutely.
- PC: You learn a lot of information, but you also learn a lot about personality and character and the way they perceive things.
- DY: That's exactly right.
- TS: And I think a lot of them are putting very thoughtful comments into their postings that they would never say in the classroom.
- DY: And they're contradicting one another but with civility.
- PC: And that's the way to do it. "I respect your opinion; however, I see it this way."
- TS: Yes. Could you give us a definition of a master teacher?
- PC: Master teacher; oh, goodness. What's a master teacher . . .
- DY: I think you could just read from what you've got on your vita. I would agree with that.
- PC: This kind of goes with what I just said a while ago. A master teacher is someone who is always willing to learn, is always reflective, who doesn't always feel that he or she has to do everything perfectly, but who never gives up. You never give up on a student, no matter what. You're able to look beyond personality conflicts and realize that your role is to educate, even if that student never accepts what you have to offer. A master teacher assumes responsibility for student learning; she resists being defensive. That doesn't mean students don't take ownership; they should. But you never buy into the notion that kids are lazy, apathetic, bad, or can't learn. There's a reason for laziness or badness, and a master teacher works effortlessly to get to the root of behavior. A master teacher believes there's no such thing as a mean kid because mean behavior comes from somewhere. It comes from pain; it comes from hurt. So I teach pre-service teachers that there's no such thing as a lazy or bad kid—there are lazy and bad behaviors. And when we get to the root of those behaviors, we can help kids.

Basically, if you don't understand human behavior, you can't be a good teacher. Passion for content alone isn't sufficient. And this is why I cringe when school systems jump to hire people out of the workforce as classroom teachers, believing their in-depth knowledge of a subject is enough.

TS: You put something on your vita, about somebody that called you a bad name in the classroom that had a lot of personal problems. Is that from personal experience that that happened?

PC: Yes. I was a new teacher. It was a seventh grade class, and I had this boy in my room I'll call Andy. I have to say this first: I had an unfair advantage over a lot of new teachers in that my mother was actually the assistant principal in my school at that time, so she gave me advice that I'm sure others didn't get. She could always give me the heads up. But she always reminded me not to let her information color my perceptions of students. She always said if she ever believed the information she gave me affected a student in a negative way, she'd never tell me anything anymore. Anyway, getting to Andy. Mom had told me I had to figure out a way to work with him. He'd had a miserable time with all previous teachers, but I didn't really know details. What I did know was that I was afraid of him. He was a 7th grader and had been retained several times—maybe three times. He was way too old and big for seventh grade. And I was a beginning teacher.

He would come into class late, and as a new teacher, I thought, "If I let Andy be late, everybody will be late. If Andy doesn't open his book, nobody will open their book, and so forth." So he came into class late one day and had done so several days previously. He didn't want to open his book or anything; he just wanted to sleep. Of course, I panicked. I thought, "I'm going to come in here one day, and everybody will have their heads on their desks, and everybody will come in late.

TS: And "How dare they sleep in my class!"

PC: Yes. I tried to get him involved, and he called me a bitch. I'm a new teacher, and it's the early 1980s. Today that kind of outburst might be fairly common in places, but NOT then.

TS: Really?

PC: Yes, and I just didn't know how to respond. I told in that essay that I gave the perfect response, not because I knew what to do but because I was terrified. The best response is no response in the moment. I remember getting through the class and thinking all kinds of crazy things, like, "Oh my gosh, what am I going to do? What am I going to say? If I say anything else to him, he's going to lash out and call me another name. He's going to yell; he's going to do whatever. I'm never going to be able to have good classroom discipline. Oh my gosh, I've gone to school for four years, and now I'm not going to be a teacher." All kinds of crazy thoughts. But at the end of class I asked him privately what was wrong. I suppose

some would have jumped on him and figured out some kind of punishment, but instincts told me if I went in that direction he would explode even worse, and I was afraid of that. I didn't know how to handle that kind of behavior. That's when he told me about his family. Man, it's hard to believe that much crap can happen in one family.

DY: Well, they're just unbelievable, Pam.

PC: Well, you know, you hear . . .

DY: That a person can be carrying that with him.

PC: That's one thing. You hear editors talk about writers when they write stories—they say, "You've got too much packed in here." But there actually are people who have lives like that. Here's a kid whose dad was an alcoholic, and his mother was dying of cancer. He had a brother who was gay, he had a sister who was pregnant, and he had another brother who was killed in a car wreck. I don't remember if I put this in there, but a couple of years later, he was killed in a car wreck.

DY: No! You didn't put that in there.

PC: Yes. This boy was. To think that we have kids like that in our schools. When that kid calls me a bitch, that's not about me; it has nothing to do with me. And that's one of the things when I talk about being a storyteller, that's the kind of thing I try to help my teachers understand. When you're dealing with classroom discipline, and these kids come in and they're upset or not focused on learning, the responses they give you are not about you.

I often tell students that we've created adolescence in our country, and they're like, "What do you mean? Kids have always been sixteen, fifteen, seventeen, or whatever." And I say, "You know, there are a couple of things in history that have absolutely created adolescence." And I'll have a couple of sharp ones in there who will say, "Okay, mandatory schooling, like high school?" I'm like, "Yes, and child labor laws." And so they hook those two things together and see how adolescence has become a "holding pen" for teens, and they see that adolescence, as we know it now, is relatively new.

DY: It's a cultural phenomenon.

PC: It's a cultural phenomenon. It's a holding pen until kids can become adults. They're not kids; they're not adults. It's a situation we have created. It's not a bad thing that we've created it, but we need to learn how to look at it and how to deal with it and how to understand it. And not blame teenagers for it.

DY: I found such wisdom in this, Pam. I so much enjoyed reading it.

PC: Oh, the narrative thing?

- DY: Yes. And the point you just mentioned. You said you learned later what all good teachers do—or what we would hope all good teachers learn—and that is that you wait. That’s often very difficult to do.
- PC: That’s what good parents do, too. It’s probably one of the worst things that we struggle with.
- DY: Yes, to hold back and let that child have the experience that he or she needs to have.
- PC: And let your own frustration and anger subside until you can think more rationally. And I’ve had my share of screw ups. But I think when I tell those stoner kinds of stories—the successes, as well as the failures, students see me as real.
- TS: How did you get interested in adolescent literature as a research area?
- PC: That came from my mentor, Pat Kelly. That was her area of research. For everybody who was going to concentrate in English Ed and curriculum instruction, it was a required course at VT. I took the course, and that’s how I got hooked. Of course, she was my mentor; she was a well-known person in that field, and my interest just kind of took off from there.
- TS: You won a service award last year as well as the teaching award this year; why don’t you talk a little bit about what you’ve done in service? You said when you came in, you were ready to do anything they told you to do. So you’ve obviously taken some leadership and gone beyond what they told you to do.
- PC: [laughter] Do you remember Bob [Robert L.] Driscoll?
- DY: Of course!
- TS: Absolutely.
- PC: He was a very important factor in my early success here because he treated me like a daughter. When we would have annual reviews or when I felt like my load was heavy, I talked with him. He always reminded me of the importance of streamlining your teaching, your research, and your scholarship. He would say, “Kennesaw is a great place to be; I love Kennesaw. But Kennesaw, like a lot of other universities, can chew you up and spit you out. If you’re not careful, you’re just going to have a bunch of things written on your vita, and they’re not going to mean a whole lot. Some things will just be a line on a vita.” So that support from him helped. It made me focus. When I looked for jobs, I looked for positions teaching Adolescent Literature or Young Adult Literature because that was my passion. I was already doing the scholarship in young adult literature because my mentor had taught me that, and so I thought, “Gosh, what am I going to do for service? How am I going to link this in here?” At that time Bob [Robert B.] Williams [Director of KSU’s Sturgis Library] was sponsoring a conference for

KSU students. A lady by the name of Bea Cain, a faculty member in the College of Education, had started it with him.

TS: Bob Williams, our librarian?

PC: Yes. Bea had moved on and Vicki [K. Victoria] McLain had taken her place in coordinating the conference. Vicki needed released to do other things, and I was asked to take over. I saw the conference as an opportunity to weave together teaching and research. So I worked on the conference for, gosh, I don't know how many years. I took it pretty much to a regional/national level and brought some prominent writers to campus. It became a rather large affair, and I enjoyed it immensely. I had so-o-o much support from the department. Everyone jumped in to do something, and it was really fun once we got going, but I'm not doing it now, and I'm not sure what's happening with it.

DY: It's a very impressive conference.

PC: We had participation from a number of different states. Everything fell into place for me because I could involve my students; they could do research, they could do presentations, they would go to sessions. I could do research connected to the authors and their work. We could involve in-service teachers and kids. It just all kind of worked together.

TS: Are you not doing it any more?

PC: No. It was really hard for me to give it up, but I thought I needed to. I'd taken it about as far as I could, but it had grown to the point that we didn't have a facility that could hold it—I mean, part of the challenge for me was seeing if I could “grow it bigger” each year, [laughter] and when we ran out of room, I felt like I hit a road block. The challenge was gone. There just wasn't a whole lot more that I could do with it. I suppose that's not the best way to look at it. I mean, teachers learned so much and kids met authors every year that they would never have met. And I suppose I could have kept doing that, but I also knew that we had it organized and advertised so well that most anyone who had an interest in young adult literature and working with teachers, kids, and schools could come in and keep it going and even do things, provide service to the schools and community, that we hadn't done yet. And I could move on to other things.

DY: That's wonderful, Pam.

TS: Well, you're president of *SIGNAL*. Will you explain what that is?

PC: Actually, I'm past president now. It's a national and international journal published by the International Reading Association. It's one of two journals in the country that is exclusively devoted to adolescent literature. There are a lot of journals that publish articles about adolescent literature, but I only know of two that just solely do that. I've been co-editor of that journal now for three or four years. I co-edit with Jim [James R.] Cope—he's an amazing expert in the field

- and so much fun to work with. I've been a member of *SIGNAL* for a few more years than that, and I guess that goes back to my mentor again, Pat Kelly. The first book review I ever did was for *SIGNAL*. [Pat] was editor of it at that time. I'm sure my connections with her helped me get voted in as co-editor.
- TS: Is it a quarterly?
- PC: No, it comes out twice a year. It did come out quarterly, but it's so expensive. Publishers had backed out of selling ads because of the down swing in the economy, so basically we've backed down to two [issues a year] for a while. I think we might be at a place where we can go back up to three. Ads have picked up this year.
- DY: Where is it published? Where is it coming out of?
- PC: It's actually published in Athens [Georgia]. Jim and I are in charge of everything. We acquire ads, everything. Jim Cope does a great job working with the publishers. Anything about technology, [I just say], "Okay, Jim, go ahead." He's awesome. I don't know how he puts up with me because I can be so anal.
- DY: He's wonderful. We're lucky to have him in our department.
- TS: Now, you've been a member of the National Council of Teachers of English. Could you talk a little bit about that? What is the National Council of Teachers of English?
- PC: It's the leading professional organization for English language arts teachers. I've worked on a number of assemblies for them and played a small role in working on the NCTE standards for English Language Arts teachers. I've also been active in ALAN—their special assembly on adolescent literature. I've reviewed for their journal and done a number of invited presentations at their national conference.
- TS: And you were state representative for a couple of years, I guess.
- PC: Yes. I conducted a membership drive in the state of Georgia.
- TS: I know that through the National Council of Teachers of English, you were on a commission on the study and teaching of young adult literature. Was this a special commission that they created?
- PC: Right. Basically our charge was to promote the use of adolescent or young adult literature—both terms are used—particularly in secondary classrooms. A problem that a lot of teachers have is that there's this belief, which is not true, that adolescent literature is too elementary for high school kids, particularly college-bound teens. Those who know young adult literature and who know who the writers are take some really powerful stories into their classrooms. So our charge has been to develop an awareness, particularly with high school teachers, of the power of young adult literature and the need for literature that addresses the

- interests, attitudes and needs of today's teens. Teens really need to connect with stories that speak to today's issues: bullying, for example; gay and lesbian issues; violence, and so on.
- DY: I think there are some classics in young adult literature: *The Giver*—would that be . . . ?
- PC: *The Giver* [by Lois Lowry] would be considered a classic in young adult literature.
- DY: There are beautiful books in young adult literature.
- PC: There really are.
- DY: They're wonderful.
- PC: *The Chocolate War* [by Robert Cormier] is one of my all-time favorite YA classics.
- DY: For all ages.
- TS: I guess I was wondering what the definition of adolescent literature is?
- PC: It's literature primarily for and about teens. What happens with older adolescents is that the curriculum is so driven at that point that teachers frequently don't find, or say they can't find, a place to use it because they have to cover the classics: Shakespeare and all those older things. And most students struggle with making a connection with these works and struggle to get through the reading. Middle school teachers use young adult literature, but fewer high school teachers do. AND by the end of middle school we begin losing readers. Research shows that one reason teens turn away from reading in high school is they hate the required reading texts. They find them boring, difficult, and meaningless. So we turn students against reading simply by the selections we use. If we gave them more choice, we might be surprised as to how many actually turned to the traditional canon.
- DY: Well, they're teaching to the test, too—the AP and all that kind of thing.
- PC: They're teaching to test.
- DY: They forget that students learn to love reading if they're reading what touches them.
- PC: There's a marketing issue with the classics, too. We are guilty of promoting the classics partially because publishers push them because nobody gets a royalty. Who gets a royalty off Shakespeare?
- DY: Yes, they don't have copyrights to worry about.

- PC: So they throw that stuff at us, and we eat it. We don't question.
- DY: It's kind of cultural elitism in the academe, too, I think, that predominates. If it's popular, it must not be good.
- PC: That goes back to when schooling became mandatory, and elitists decided that they had to elevate their kids from the "common kids." So the common kid goes to school and learns math and learns to read the *Bible*, and the elitist goes off and reads Shakespeare and Chaucer and that became the standard. And in many ways we're still in that paradigm.
- TS: I guess *Harry Potter* fits in with adolescent literature. The kids read it, and it's about kids. Because it's popular, I guess . . .
- PC: Yes, that is true. And I have to admit I didn't read the entire series until this past summer. I just wasn't interested because I've never been drawn to fantasy. But when my seventeen-year-old set out to read every book in the series—staying up until three and four in the morning, not just to FINISH a story, but to start another—I knew I had no choice. I just had to read them. I had no idea how complex the Potter books are. I mean, for a college class or anywhere, the multiple layers in those stories is just unreal. And the talent and the skill that she [J. K. Rowling] has is simply amazing. She wastes nothing. Everything in her stories has purpose.
- DY: I always ask students after a World Lit class [what they] wish we had not done and wish we would do and are glad we had done, and I've had recommendations for that.
- PC: For Harry Potter?
- DY: Oh, sure. And there are a couple of faculty who have used Harry Potter books.
- PC: The hard thing about using them in a college class is [that] you can't do one and do it justice.
- DY: Yes, that's what I thought. You've got to get the whole . . .
- PC: Yes, and you don't have time for it.
- TS: Well, I see you wrote a book review of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* for *SIGNAL*, and you've also reviewed the *Chamber of Secrets*.
- PC: Yes, I reviewed them when nobody knew what they were. I mean I had the advanced reader copies—the uncorrected proofs they make before they publish the book.
- DY: Oh, they sent you copies to review?

- PC: Yes, I have the galleys, you know, the preview copies. When they came out with the last two or three books, they wouldn't send galleys, so I told my son, "I don't know how much these are worth, but I'm keeping them."
- DY: Talk about a marketing phenomenon!
- PC: Oh, yes. Jelly beans and all, right?
- DY: Yes. Good thing they're good, right?
- TS: Well, I was impressed that on some of your publications, I saw names of some of our students as second and third authors. Kirsten Perla is on one with you, for instance, on "Jerks, Bullies, Wimps, and Jocks."
- PC: Yes. You were asking me about a master teacher. I guess part of what I left out there is the fact that a master teacher is a lifelong learner and works with students on a level playing field. You're both learners, and I think that my students learn more when they see me learning beside them. That speaks a lot to why I like to write and research and do presentations with students. When they see that you value their knowledge, I think they're more eager to learn. I think that's true for most people. If I'm sitting in a class, and I don't think the teacher values anything I have to say, I'm not going to participate. I'm watching the clock.
- DY: I think that's a big part of mentoring.
- TS: Have you seen a change in students during your ten years here?
- PC: I think we may have more traditional students than before because of the housing, but I can't say I've seen a change in students other than that. I see the same passion come through, the same passion to achieve lifelong dreams and to create better lives for themselves and their families. So many of our students are nontraditional students and because I grew up with a mother who had dropped out of high school and returned to complete her high school degree when my older brother and I started school—she rode the school bus with us—I just naturally gravitate toward older students, students with families. I go back to those days, to how hard they were, both financially and emotionally and my heart aches. But I think I've said that before.
- TS: What keeps you at Kennesaw?
- PC: I love the people I work with. I love the campus. The students. I love the mindset. I'm sure I could find another place that I would like, but it would be hard to leave. I'm very comfortable with the people here. And the curriculum—I'm proud of the way we train teachers; I think we challenge them quite a bit. We don't just let them pass through; we look closely at how they're performing. I think we have an exceptional program.
- TS: With the mindset, can you elaborate a little bit on what you mean?

PC: Open-minded, receptive to new ideas, caring about one another—I think that’s important in the work world as well as the private world. I see that a lot here.

TS: Okay.

DY: This has been delightful. I knew it would be.

PC: I felt like I just rambled.

TS: No. Is there anything that you think we should cover that we haven’t? Maybe we’ve asked a number of people what they consider their most significant accomplishments here . . .

PC: Most significant accomplishment. . . No doubt earning the Distinguished Teaching Award. But in terms of things that I’ve done—contributions that I’ve made—probably the Children’s and Young Adult Literature Conference. When I first came here, I wouldn’t see young adult authors displayed in any of the bookstores. I was like, “What’s this about? Is this a cultural phenomenon here, and nobody knows about Will Hobbs or Chris Curtis?” Now, I see authors we’ve had on campus displayed everywhere. It’s cool to see books pulled out for summer reading of authors we’ve had at Kennesaw. It’s just too much of a coincidence to see the very authors that we’ve had at Kennesaw on summer reading lists. Yeah, that’s what I’m most proud of.

TS: I think for some reason you’re the first one from the College of Education to actually win the Teaching Award in our twenty-something-year history [of the award].

PC: We were talking about that the other day. I told Marj that she had better get a plaque and get my name on it! I said, “I don’t know why that’s true because we’re teachers. This is the first time.” So that’s interesting, but I don’t know why.

TS: Hopefully, you won’t be the last from over there. Maybe they’ve held your college to a higher standard.

PC: Maybe so.

TS: At any rate, we appreciate you coming in and talking to us.

PC: I appreciate you talking to me.

TS: It’s been very interesting.

PC: I look forward to seeing what I’ve said.

DY: It’s always fun to go back and read what you’ve said.

PC: I doubt that’s true. [chuckle]

INDEX

Appalachian Women, Vein of Iron, 4

Burress, Daisy (See Cole, Pamela Burress, mother)
Burress, Hobert (See Cole, Pamela Burress, paternal grandfather)
Burress, Jimmy (See Cole, Pamela Burress, father)
Burress, Trula B. (See Cole, Pamela Burress, paternal grandmother)

Cain, Bea, 24

Carter, President Jimmy, 9

Childress, Ron, 7

Clinch Valley College, 12, 13

Cole, Pamela Burress

Birth and childhood, 1-4, 10

Early teaching, 1, 8, 12, 21

Mother, 1-6, 12, 14, 19, 21, 28

Parents as mentors, 1, 2, 4-6

Father, 1-4, 7, 14

Paternal grandfather, 1, 7, 8

Paternal great-grandmother, 1

On cultural inequities and tensions, 1, 2, 5, 11, 16, 17

Maternal grandparents, 6, 8

Undergraduate school, 6-8

Son, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16-18, 27, 28

High school memories, 7

Paternal grandmother, 7, 8

Master's degree and education, 8, 9

Mentors, 8-10

On dialect as academic liability, 8-10

Media specialist degree, 12

Publications, 13, 25, 28

Doctoral dissertation, 13

Reasons for coming to Kennesaw, 14

Academic work with sexuality and gender issues, 16-18, 26

Distinguished Teaching Award, 19, 29

Learning from students, 19, 20, 28

Master teaching, 20-23, 28

Adolescence as cultural phenomenon, 22

Research in adolescent literature, 23, 24, 26

Academic service, 23-25

Professional collaboration with students, 28

Brother, 28

Reasons for staying at Kennesaw, 28

Teaching the teachers, 28, 29

Significant accomplishments at Kennesaw, 29

Cole, Taylor (See Cole, Pamela Burrell, son)
Compton, Ron, 7
Cope, Jim, 24, 25
Cormier, Robert, 26
Curtis, Chris, 29

Driscoll, Robert L., 23

Economopoulos, Marjorie, 14, 19, 29
Emory & Henry College, 6, 8

Harry Potter, 27
Hobbs, Will, 29

“Jerks, Bullies, Wimps, and Jocks,” 28
Johnson, David M., 9

Kelly, Patricia P., 8-10, 13, 23, 25
Kennesaw State University
 Nontraditional students, 2, 3, 28
 NCATE issues, 14, 15
 As a Research II school, 15
 Faculty as overachievers, 15, 16
 Culture of campus, 16
 Changes over the years, 16, 18, 19, 28
 International programs, 16
 Intellectual climate, 18, 19
 Doctorate program, 19
 Georgia History, Georgia Literature class, 20
 WebCT, 20
 Children’s and Young Adult Literature Conference, 23, 24, 29

Lowry, Lois, 26

McLain, K. Victoria, 24
Mean Girls, 18

National Council of Teachers of English, 25

Odd Girl Out, 17

Perla, Kirsten, 28
“Portfolio Talk in a Sixth-Grade Writing Workshop,” 13

Radford University, 8, 9
Rowling, J.K., 27

Salyer, Barbara A., 4

Severt, Miss, 7

Siegel, Betty L., 1, 4, 16

Signal, 24, 25

Simmons, Rachel, 17

Southwest Virginia Community College, 3, 6, 7

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 8-12, 23

Wan, Yiping, 16

Ward, Jimmy, 6, 7

Williams, Robert B., 23, 24