

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW WITH KAREN ROBINSON  
CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT  
for the  
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Thursday, 28 August 2008  
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TS: Today I'm interviewing Karen Robinson who received the KSU Foundation Distinguished Teaching Award in 2008. Karen, why don't we begin by asking you about your background—where you grew up and where you went to school and such as that.

KR: Great. I was born in Evanston, Illinois. Both of my parents are graduates of Northwestern University. Actually they both grew up in Evanston as well. They went to Evanston High School. So, that's how they came to be living there when I was born. Not too long after that my father, for his [military] service, had a choice where he could be stationed. My parents have always loved the opportunity to travel abroad; so my father chose Châteauroux in France, which is south of Paris. We moved there before I could walk—that's one of the family jokes that I learned to walk in France. My brother was born there in 1960. Then, when we came back—my father had graduated from medical school at Northwestern; so he was an Air Force doctor—that was his service—so, he decided that he wanted to look around the country as to where to start a practice. California had attracted him for a number of reasons. When you live in Evanston, the climate . . . [laughs]. Northern California turned out to be the place he went. He researched and learned that the Santa Clara Valley would be a good place to start a practice as a pediatrician, a private practice. He wound up eventually having two partners, but at first he just had one partner. So, our family moved to Saratoga, California, which most people recognize by its proximity to Palo Alto, California, not far from there, and across the valley from San Jose. It used to be filled with all of these prune orchards; agriculture was the major product. As a kid growing up there I loved the orchards, we all loved the orchards, and one of the great sadnesses of my childhood life was seeing them taken away to make subdivisions. I even wrote some bad poems when I was a little kid about all of the orchards going away. So I grew up in Saratoga, California.

TS: How old were you when you moved there?

KR: My brother was born in '60, I was born in '57, and we moved there shortly thereafter. I went to nursery school in California; so, it must have been about '61.

TS: So a child of the '60s in California.

KR: Right, right. I guess during my awareness years more of the '70s, but that was very interesting and, I think, figures very largely into who I am and what I like.

TS: What's your father's name, by the way?

KR: His name is Karl Willard Robinson.

TS: What about your mother?

KR: Her name is Theresa, and her maiden name was Van der Vort, of Dutch ancestry.

TS: So, you're growing up in California, and they're taking away all the orchards while you're growing up, and something to get real radical about, I guess.

KR: I wasn't a diehard activist, but I know I mourned the loss of the trees [laughter].

TS: Right. Enough to write poetry about it.

KR: Right.

TS: You made it all the way to Colorado to get a bachelor's degree. How did that happen?

KR: Well, once I got to the stage of selecting universities, I had this part of me that thought it would be good for me to go away. I can't remember exactly what attracted me in particular to the University of Colorado. Interestingly enough, my mother did go there for two years before she came back and finished at Northwestern. Maybe that came into the conversation, but this may betray my northern-California-loving-nature background: One of the chief advertisements the University of Colorado at Boulder has always used is this amazing photo of the Flat Irons, which are the foothills of the Rockies. They are these stunning, stone-faced mountains, and the university is set just down the hill from them. In my memory I remember being really attracted to that natural setting. I was also an avid skier at that time. I was an avid student as well, but that's what I remember; not necessarily researching thoroughly how the academics suited me, but wanting to find a place that I thought was beautiful and close to skiing, but still had a fairly good reputation. I guess the University of Colorado also had a reputation as a fun school, but I didn't select it because of that. I also applied to UC Berkeley, and I was accepted both places. UC Berkeley, that would have been an amazing place to go, but, I thought, I need to go farther away. I was really homesick the first semester, and I hated it for that reason. I applied again to UC Berkeley and was accepted again, but by the end of the year I had started acclimating myself to the school and the environment there. So, I wound up staying.

TS: And by that time you had to pay tuition, I guess, at Berkeley, whereas earlier on I think it was free until . . .

KR: Yes, it wasn't free at that time. I know it was a really good price, but it wasn't free.

TS: So, off to Boulder, Colorado you go. I guess you were a traditional student going off at age seventeen or eighteen.

KR: I was totally traditional. And my parents were completely supportive. So, I was fortunate they funded all of my needs, paid all of my tuition, paid for my room and board and such. So I was able to be—it's so different than today—a complete full-time student. I didn't have to work, although at a certain point I elected to work on the campus to bring in some extra money. I remember my first semester coming back for Christmas, and I was just so exhilarated by everything that I was learning. I was really, really happy with all of my classes and my professors, and I think by that time I had, of course, a love for the theatre going way back.

TS: I was going to ask you about that because you actually ended up with two majors in English Literature and in Theatre. How did that love of the theatre come about? How long back does it go?

KR: Well, I was in my first play when I was eight years old. So, maybe I was bitten by the proverbial theatre bug then, and it never went away. Throughout high school becoming involved in the drama activities and really close with the drama teachers there, I found my niche in terms of both relationships with professors or teachers, but also a group of other students. There's a real sense of belonging when you're in a cast of a play. You become very close in a way that you may not in other activities. It immediately gives and gave me a sense of belonging and affirmation. That had re-ignited my love for it in high school. Then, I went off to the university, and I tried to not go solely into the theatre the very instant I stepped foot on the campus because of that ongoing awareness we all have in our culture that it's extraordinarily difficult to make a living in the arts and in the theatre. For a while I thought I was going to major in languages; that was another gift and love of mine in high school was language. I had a really close relationship with my French teacher as well. I also started taking Spanish, so both theatre and languages were a point of focus in high school, so I started focusing on that my first semester at the University of Colorado, Boulder. But I couldn't stay away from the theatre department, and I started auditioning for plays, and then I got cast in a play.

TS: Were you in France long enough to pick up the language that would stick with you?

KR: I wasn't, really, because we were speaking English in our home, and I was one, two and three years old. I don't recall language from that time, but I had a pretty good gift for memorization. So, at the high school level I was really good at it. I remember I worked in the language lab in high school also. So, I was absorbing a lot of it. When I was in my later high school years, because of my parents' love of France, they really cultivated that in myself and my brother growing up and different aspects of French culture. Snippets of language, but the food, and, you know, "Look at our photographs." I did an exchange with a French woman my age, and I went and lived with her family for the whole summer before I went off to college. So, French was right there front and center in my consciousness by the time I was going off to Boulder.

TS: Okay. So you're doing languages, but somewhere along the line you decided not to major in language because you liked theatre so much.

KR: Yes, theatre and literature. I shifted over to that major the second part of my freshman year.

TS: I would say those two go together very nicely.

KR: Yes.

TS: Okay. You get two degrees in 1980, and then what happens after that?

KR: Yes, 1980. Then I had applied for graduate schools and was accepted into New York University. So, the summer in-between undergraduate and graduate school I came home and got myself mentally prepped for that. My high school drama teacher/mentor had started a Shakespeare festival in my hometown. It took place at the Paul Masson Winery. I'm trying to think, that had started in earnest, but it didn't start immediately at the winery. We would do the shows outside during the summer. Before that, there was this beautiful villa that was built and owned by a senator that's across the highway from where I grew up. You can hike up into the hills. We did an outdoor production in that theater. We did *The Comedy of Errors*. So I started getting immersed in Shakespeare. My high school drama teacher started a summer series of classes while I was in high school. We would do nights of scenes, and we would study Shakespeare plays, and so that love started. So, I worked with that group of people before I went off to graduate school. Then the NYU program was offered by Tisch School of the Arts, and it was a conservatory program, a master of fine arts.

TS: One of the things we're interested in is mentors; so, why don't you mention the name of that high school teacher?

KR: Her name is Judith Sutton.

TS: What was the name of the high school?

KR: Saratoga High School. I had two other mentors there. I had Tim Haggerty. He was my English teacher, but then I did some independent studies with him. To this day I thank him because he is really the taskmaster who taught me the craft of writing. I was a straight A student in high school, and I never really had rigorous feedback on my writing until I decided that I was going to do an independent study with him and write papers relative to literature and Shakespeare. I remember him reading my first piece and sitting me down and saying, "You need to learn to write." It was a crushing blow because no teacher had said so straightforwardly to me that you've got some writing issues to deal with. I really am grateful to him for that. He taught me about coherence and that rigorous critical eye of the re-writing and the looking at your work in such a way that you really work on crafting it. I'm really grateful to him. I also did an independent scene study with him with a scene partner—we would take scenes from plays and work on them.

TS: Well, that's a gift.

KR: Yes. And both of them I'm still in touch with. They come to my parents' Christmas party every year, which I just love. He wound up marrying my French teacher/mentor, so it's all connected. Her name was Ann Haggerty. So, those were the three teachers.

TS: Even then, French, English and Theatre. So, in your high school you actually had somebody that was a theatre teacher?

KR: Yes, we did, we had a drama teacher. We had a drama class. I know, nowadays that's becoming more and more the exception than the rule because of all the cuts in arts programming. I think she taught English also, and creative writing is one of her fortes. In fact, she's a published prize-winning poet now. But she taught a drama class, and we had a season of plays that we produced at the high school.

TS: Sounds like a great high school.

KR: Yes, it's been a very well regarded high school unto this day. It was a good high school.

TS: Early on you're interested in Shakespeare, then.

KR: Yes, one of her protégés, in a sense, I guess, had been a graduate of the high school before I was a graduate. Then he went off and trained at the prestigious American Conservatory Theater [San Francisco], which accepts still a small number of students, and back then did as well. He came back, and then he taught. To give you a sense of how connected everything is in this little town, he was also the son of the woman who was my kindergarten teacher [Betty Peck], who teaches kindergarten in a holistic way that is totally distinctive. Some might smile and say, "Oh, it sounds so northern California." But she incorporates storytelling and nature expeditions, and she lives in this wooded home that's like this magical kind of fairy land. Back in her backyard was where the stage was where we would do these summer plays.

TS: What's his name?

KR: His name is Bill Peck. Now he teaches high school as well, so it's interesting all these teachers. I didn't really realize it until I started thinking about it how much teachers have figured in my life as special friends and mentors. I remember we gathered a small group of us in his mother's home, and we went through Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* detail by detail. So, it was this wonderful opportunity to sit with a play and go moment to moment through it. So, I really credit him with exposing me early on to those plays and looking at them in a very detailed manner. Yes, that was back, I think I was either still in high school or maybe the first [year of college]—because I would come home during the summers.

TS: Okay, so you go all the way across the country to New York and work on a Master of Fine Arts degree in directing, I guess it was.

KR: It actually started out being acting. I auditioned as an actor, and what they do is they winnow down the number of people every year. They start with a larger class. We were in two sections. There were thirty-some of us, and they winnow it down. By the time I got to the end of my second year Olympia Dukakis was my acting teacher. She was very insightful, as you can imagine, just by seeing her work, if you've seen her work on film, an amazing acting teacher and very insightful. She, by talking to me, pulled out from me that I really, ultimately, was not as interested in acting as I was in directing and teaching. So, she orchestrated me shifting in my curricula from the acting over to the directing, which was an exception. They didn't do that with people there. You usually did all three of your years in one. So that was really a favor that they did for me, and I feel very grateful for that. So, yes, my MFA officially had to have one name, and that name ought to be directing because that's how I ended. But I really did two years in acting training and one year in directing, which is great.

TS: That's a good background for directing.

KR: That's what I thought too. You're going to work better with actors if you understand the process.

TS: I asked Robert Sherer this when I interviewed him. He went through a Master of Fine Arts in art, and these three-year programs are very, very rigorous. Why don't they just call them a doctoral program?

KR: Well, they might as well because you do the equivalent, but I think in our culture that there is a separation, unfortunately, I don't think there should be, between theory and praxis. The MFAs are focused mostly on praxis, and that degree has that rubric attached to it, the Master of Fine Arts, whereas the Doctorate of Philosophy is more geared towards the theoretical. That's true in theatre too. If you pursue a doctorate in theatre, you are going to spend more of your time researching, writing, theory and criticism and history and literary analysis, whereas if you do the fine arts that means hands on. It's a larger percentage of applied.

TS: So if you actually really want to direct a play the practical or the praxis is much more important.

KR: Yes, that's going to equip you to do it. What they're doing now, it's interesting, I think. They've created DFAs in recognition, I think, of the fact that this fine arts hands-on work does merit a doctorate. So now you'll find a DFA in dramaturgy or directing whereas you didn't twenty-plus years ago. So it's addressing your question.

TS: Yes, which could be advantageous in the academic world to have the doctoral title. It sounds to me like you could take pretty much what you had and put a dissertation on top of it.

KR: That's what you would do, I think, yes, put a dissertation, a substantive piece of writing.

TS: Yes. So you go through one of the top-notch acting and directing schools in the country and get through in '84, I believe it is. So what happens after you graduate?

KR: First I was on that typical path of being in New York City. The old joke and truism is that you support your arts habit by getting a job [waiting on] theatre folks in a restaurant. I did that. I was fortunate because, when I was at NYU, I secured an internship with an off-off-Broadway company. So, I started networking with them. As part of that I did stage management work and dramaturgy and assistant directing. It was called Double-Image Theater at that time. It since has changed names, but it was founded by a team of a graduate from Yale and a graduate from NYU. So, there was that connection. So I had that connection, which was great, and I met some of the up and coming playwrights because of the new playwriting series that they had. I would assist with those. So, I was doing that at the same time I was working in a restaurant, and then they connected me with an opportunity to be an assistant director Off-Broadway for a musical. It was called *Mayor—The Musical*. It was a comic musical about [New York mayor] Ed [Edward Irving] Koch. The composer and lyricist was Charles Strouse, the man who wrote *Annie*. The director was Jeffrey B. Moss. The notice came down to the company where I was interning, and so I applied for it, and I got it. And you know who was the writer of the book was Warren Leight who wound up writing the musical that was so successful, *Side Man*, on Broadway later on. It was a great way for a California girl to get to know some of the inside jokes about New York City because it was full of all these allusions. In fact, one of the characters in it was Leona Helmsley, and she came to the opening night party. This woman behaved exactly like...I still remember her and her husband [Harry B. Helmsley]. We had the opening night party in this new mall that had opened, and they were posing for photo ops on a carousel horse going up and down. So that was pretty amusing getting to know about some of those New York insiders. So I was the A.D. or assistant to the director on that show. So at least I wasn't just working in a restaurant.

TS: How long did the show last?

KR: I'm not sure how long it ran. It ran for several months. It was fairly well received.

TS: Did Mayor Koch come to it?

KR: Oh, yes, he came on opening night, yes.

TS: So you weren't too critical of him in the play then, I guess.

KR: No, it was in good fun. It had a good spirit; it had a positive spirit to it. There was a comic song about yuppies, so it was very much of a light-hearted satire about contemporary urban life. So, I did that. I had met my husband-to-be on one of those summers with the Shakespeare festival because every summer I would go back to California while I was in graduate school. I was cast in this festival. My teacher would take students from training programs at different points in the country. He [my husband] was at American Conservatory Theater. He moved out to New York City once we met and fell in love, and he had this dream of starting a Shakespeare theater.



TS: What's his name?

KR: His name is Richard Garner. His dream was stoked by being in that Shakespeare festival in California.

TS: Is he from New York?

KR: He's from the South. That's why I'm in the South. He had come from Georgia where he spent his high school years [and moved] to San Francisco.

TS: What part of Georgia?

KR: He spent his high school years in Albany. His father was in the army; so they moved around. But they wound up settling there in his high school years. He went to Berry College and was a theatre major there and passionate about being an actor. So, he applied to training programs, and he wound up at the American Conservatory Theater where these connections meet because that's where my high school mentor did a summer program. And that's where that other teacher, Bill Peck, had gone; and that's how we all met, in the Shakespeare theater in California at Paul Masson Winery. He had this dream. While we were in New York, his old college buddy from Berry called him and said, "If you still want to start a theatre, I am a drama club teacher here at Oglethorpe University. They said they would let us establish it on their campus." New York can be pretty hard on you when you're trying to make ends meet, and you're in the arts, and you're working in a restaurant. So, this was a great opportunity, plus, Richard and I decided we wanted to stay together. So, I moved down here with him, and he started the theatre [Georgia Shakespeare Festival]. At that time we both were working in a restaurant here to support our arts work. He was doing preliminary work on the theatre. I wound up staying at the restaurant until they closed it. Then I worked a bit administratively at his theatre as well as with another theatre in town. But it wasn't enough to really bring in a huge paycheck. Well, then, the wife-to-be of his partner in starting this theatre . . .

TS: I was going to ask the buddy's name from Berry College?

KR: His name was Lane Anderson. He was originally from Woodstock, Georgia. That's how they met at Berry, being in this vicinity. He left the theatre and decided to pursue other lines of work.

TS: To make more money?

KR: Yes, and also running a theatre is really stressful and exhausting because it's always a struggle to keep the doors open. So, Richard was there at the helm by himself. But Lane's wife-to-be was a graduate student at Wake Forest University. I had been trying to find teaching work here in town, and I almost had something lined up at Georgia Tech teaching composition. But, then, that fell through. She knew I wanted to teach, and one of the professors was going on leave at Wake Forest. So, she said, "Karen, you should

apply because you could be the person who replaces him for that semester.” So, I did, and I was accepted. So, I taught there and directed there for a semester.

TS: So that’s how you got to Wake Forest.

KR: That’s how I got to Wake Forest. That was my first full time teaching job. I taught in bits and pieces prior to that, but that was my first job.

TS: But that’s what you really wanted to do was to teach to pay the bills and direct.

KR: Yes, but I’m not one of those people that wanted to teach just to support my professional theatre work. I knew I wanted to teach for its own sake, as well. I wanted to do both.

TS: Okay, so, you go over to Wake Forest and fill in for somebody else over there. Also, I think, North Carolina School of the Arts is in there somewhere.

KR: Right, that link was how I wound up at the North Carolina School of the Arts because I did that for a semester and just fell in love with it. It was a fabulous place to teach, and you know how when you do something, and it affirms that, yes, this is what I was meant to do and want to do. So, of course, I was really saddened when that semester ended. I went back to Atlanta, and they contacted me because they wanted me to come back the next spring on a contract basis to direct one of their productions. This is another one of the benefits of teaching in a theatre department that you get to both fulfill your teaching passion and your practical theatre passion because theatre departments will always have the academic curricula and then a production season. So, I was going to go back and do that. And North Carolina School of the Arts called the Wake Forest department, and they said, “We have a sudden need for a theatre history teacher; do you have anybody you could refer to us?” They said, “Well, as a matter of fact, the person who worked for us last year is coming back. She might be available. Why don’t you contact her?” So that’s what happened. They contacted me for just the one class; so, I was doing on a freelance basis the production and the class. Then after that year ended they needed a full time temporary to keep filling that position before they got a national search together. So I did that. Then they did the national search, and I was one of the finalists, and they wound up offering me the full time permanent job, and I accepted it. So that began my tenure there.

TS: How long did you stay there?

KR: I was there for ten years.

TS: Ten years?

KR: Yes, it was as great place to work.

TS: Tell me a little bit about the North Carolina School of the Arts. Where is it located?

KR: It's located in Winston-Salem, the same city as Wake Forest University. It's really a distinctive institution in the University of North Carolina system because it does have the status of a college and a university—there are graduate programs now—but it's a conservatory style school. North Carolina has a pretty enlightened history as far as state support of the arts. It's wonderful that here's this institution that's dedicated to training professional artists, and they have now five different schools: a school of Drama; the school of Music; the school of Film, started while I was there; the school of Design and Production; and the school of Dance. Then they have a high school program in Visual Arts. The faculty are all these amazing professional artists from all over the country and the world, and then they bring in amazing guest artists. What they do is they offer their students the BFA degree at the undergrad level, so that the kids have to have their academic component of studies alongside their conservatory work. I was teaching in the Academic Studies department. I think one reason I was attractive was because I trained at a conservatory, so I really understood the modus operandi for their work as an academic teacher.

TS: We don't really have anything like this exactly in Georgia, do we?

KR: No, we don't. Valdosta State University offers a BFA, which means that a greater percentage of the curricula in the theatre department is going to be praxis, hands on applied, but that's part of a larger, typical university. This is a university that every part of it is structured in a conservatory style manner. So, yes, it's a really wonderful gem in the crown of North Carolina.

TS: Sounds like a great place to be.

KR: And they mandate that 50 percent of the student population must come from instate, so that they're serving the state.

TS: We got away from mentors. We probably ought to do more with that before we get into your teaching career. We talked about mentors in high school. What about at NYU?

KR: Well, even before we get to NYU, at Boulder, I should mention there were some teachers that I just adored. My foremost mentor is a woman, she's retired now, and her name is Lee Potts. Her formal name was, I think, Margaret Lee Potts, but she went by Lee Potts. And again another interesting connection, she was a graduate of Northwestern. My parents [went there], and my grandfather taught at Northwestern, and here she is someone who also graduated from Northwestern. She just was an amazing professor and teacher. I adored her both in terms of her personality—she was so passionate and gave every ounce of her being to her students—and she was a brilliant director. Just her attention to detail and her standards of excellence, both in performance and in academic work that accompanied it, really, I think, have always been my benchmark for high standards. Because of the Northwestern background—and this ties back into KSU later on—there is a huge background in oral interpretation, which is why I wanted to do the double major in English literature and Theatre because oral interpretation takes a broader spectrum of material as potential performance material for the stage. That is that it encompasses

literature that's not originally written in a dramatic mode or intended to be for the stage: poems, non-fiction, fiction, prose fiction, verse fiction, and adapting or shaping those for performance on the stage so that you can follow that track.

TS: Oral interpretation, what is that exactly?

KR: It means the interpretation and performance of literature other than just play scripts (although it encompasses those as well) for the stage. So it comes from our long standing western tradition of rhetoric and elocution going all the way back to the rhapsodes in ancient Greece who performed sections of *The Iliad* which is an epic—this idea of the oral performance and artistic interpretation of all kinds of literature. Northwestern is famous for that background.

TS: My first thought is that it's almost like folk literature but it's really not.

KR: Yes, it can come from the folk, but in the academic arena, historically, it comes from what has been written down. Now, in recent years there has been a desire to move into oral history and to honor the voices through orality that were not privileged through being published. So like many aspects of our world today that are trying to be more inclusive, I think there's this resurgence of interest in oral history ... then it's written down ... then it becomes literature. But all of that, yes.

TS: Great. So Lee Potts at Colorado and then . . .

KR: And then I had some English professors that I really admired. R.L. Widmann, and Dr. Evans was my Shakespeare as literature teacher—I remember him.

TS: I think one of the attractive things about the field that you're in is that you can really have a closer relationship with students when you're working with them on a play or something like that than you ordinarily have if you're in a lecture hall of forty or fifty people.

KR: Yes. That's so true. And I think that's one of the attractions.

TS: It's almost like the relationship a coach has with an athlete.

KR: Absolutely.

TS: In fact, I guess it's exactly the same relationship.

KR: Yes, it really is. And you tend to mingle your social lives occasionally maybe more than you would with a professor you just had in a lecture hall.

TS: Everybody has a different personality, but I think you're enumerating a lot more mentors than the average person that I've interviewed in this project has.

KR: That's interesting.

TS: But I think it may be because of the field that you're in.

KR: Yes, I think it does have a lot to do with that. Absolutely.

TS: Well, you mentioned Olympia Dukakis at NYU; any others?

KR: Ron Van Lieu who has now become a master renowned teacher of acting. Since I left his reputation has grown even more. He was my first year acting teacher.

TS: How much of what you picked up from your mentors do you apply in your own classes?

KR: Oh, I think an untold amount, yes.

TS: Any of them that are real role models that you can say, I'm teaching just exactly like that person?

KR: There's another mentor that I should mention though who is outside of the strictly academic environment, and his name is Sabin Epstein. When I started stage managing at the theater that my husband founded down here—Georgia Shakespeare Festival it used to be called.

TS: What do they call it now?

KR: It's Georgia Shakespeare now.

TS: They just dropped the festival?

KR: Yes, to open up the image of that name. But he was one of our directors at the California Shakespeare festival [Valley Shakespeare Festival], and so he is probably my primary mentor with regards to the way that I direct, because when I was with him as an actor in that show, I experienced how he directed actors. Then I stage managed for him in the early years of Georgia Shakespeare here in the late 1980s. So I watched him work and absorbed a lot of those techniques. But they do dovetail with Olympia Dukakis and Ron Van Lieu and the moment-to-moment detail work that you do with an actor. Those kinds of details mingle with the kind of vocal and physical details that I learned from Lee Potts at University of Colorado that are applied to literary performance. Of course, I have to credit Judith Sutton from high school as well because that class I took with her in drama brought some of the techniques from American Conservatory Theater that she had learned in terms of how an actor works on a piece. So I think all of those come together in terms of my directing, but also when I'm working with students in class on performance or presentations. Those same details come into play.

TS: It seems like you were blessed with lots of role models along the way.

KR: Yes, I guess so.

TS: What years were you at North Carolina School of the Arts; was that right up until you came here?

KR: It was just about—1989 to '99. Then I moved up here because Richard and I had been living in the two different cities—he here, and I in Winston-Salem.

TS: I was going to say you must have had to use some real skills to keeping that relationship working.

KR: We did. It's pretty impressive, isn't it, ten years? We would trade weekends. I'd come down here, he'd go up there, and then I'd spend the summers down here. Finally, we decided that as exhilarating and adventurous as that was that it would be nice to live full time together. So it was hard, but I chose to let that go. I moved down here without a job, which was pretty scary to me. I lucked out because Julia Matthews, who used to teach in the Department of Theater, when it was just called that, here—she and I had struck up a partnership because Richard had paired us together at Georgia Shakespeare when I directed a project. He met her at some audition or conference or something here and found out about her—here's another interesting connection—and he said, "How would you like to work with her as your dramaturge?" So we started a partnership and hit it off. Her father and mother teach and taught music at North Carolina School of the Arts. She went there as a high school student. So we always tell our students that you never burn any bridges in the arts world because there are only sixty-four people in the theatre business because everything always comes back around to some connection. But she was in the department here, and I had visited here to see her directing work. She let me know that there was a position open, so I applied. It was really fortunate timing.

TS: I'd say. So 2000 was when you started here then at Kennesaw?

KR: Yes. In January, mid-academic year they got the funding.

TS: We generally ask people why they came to Kennesaw, but, probably, it's pretty obvious in your case that you wanted something in the metro area.

KR: Absolutely. And the fact that Julia had become a dear friend and artistic collaborator by that time definitely made me come here.

TS: I think I had written down that you directed something like thirteen productions for Georgia Shakespeare over the years. All of this is going on in the summertime, I guess.

KR: Right, exactly.

TS: And maybe some even before you went to North Carolina School of the Arts.

KR: No, I'd been doing the stage-managing before that. It's interesting because my husband was the producing artistic director, and there was a time that it needed to become clear for the board of directors and other people that I actually was trained in this and that there weren't—you know that notion of fears of nepotism and all that. So it evolved naturally because of an opportunity that opened up when a director had to be let go, and I stepped in. That was a segue that then led me into directing for Georgia Shakespeare.

TS: It was probably good that you could go over to North Carolina and establish your own reputation over there.

KR: Exactly.

TS: And then come back.

KR: Absolutely.

TS: What were some of the plays that you directed?

KR: At Georgia Shakespeare?

TS: Yes.

KR: Well, I've directed three plays by Molière there, which I mention because we've been talking about this connection with French, and that was a great coming together.

TS: Were these English translations?

KR: They were, but the really exciting thing about those opportunities is whenever you do a play in translation, you search through the different versions, and it's often a challenge to find one that you like. The preeminent translator of many of Molière's plays is a man named Richard Wilbur. He specifies when his agent grants the rights to a company that you may not change the original time period in which the play is set. Now, one of the delightful, I think, trends in directing classic plays that's emerged over the last hundred years is the directorial choice to set a piece in another time period in the interest of creating metaphors and analogies and accessibility for an audience. So we do a lot of that at Georgia Shakespeare. I wanted to reset the time period for this particular production of *Tartuffe* [written in 1664] it was. Then the contract came, and we were going to choose Richard Wilbur, and this is what it said. So I started searching around for other translators, and in the process I struck up an e-mail relationship with a renowned British translator named Ranjit Bolt. He turned out to be a really friendly, jolly fellow—I've only met him through e-mail—who was thrilled that we were interested in his work. He happened to be working on a new translation of *Tartuffe* that had not yet been produced.

TS: So you got to be the first.

- KR: Yes. We had the best time going back and forth. He was really accommodating to me. I've now done three of his translations, and one of them I did at KSU. He would change texts and write up new rhyming couplets when I would say, "Well, I'm setting the play in this period, and so this language you have is really specific; can we revise it so that it fits?" He would do that, and he loved it, and we just had the best time. He's petrified of flying, so he never saw any of the productions, but that was really exciting.
- TS: It's really interesting because any translation is an interpretation of what the original was anyway.
- KR: Exactly.
- TS: That is probably fun to do them in translation and use language that relates to people today.
- KR: Yes. And so I directed the Molière, and that's a great example too of where the work at Kennesaw dovetails with the professional work and each informs the other because I had done one of his pieces here as well. Then I've directed about five or six Shakespeare plays for that theatre. We'll do contemporary classics there, so I've directed *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Amadeus* and the eighteenth-century comedy of manners, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Three Musketeers*.
- TS: That's great. So you come to Kennesaw in 2000. You teach directing and performance studies. The department is now called Theatre and Performance Studies. Originally, it was just Theater. Is that a national trend to go toward performance studies?
- KR: We're actually on the forefront of it.
- TS: Are you?
- KR: Yes. You're starting to see it emerge more and more because the realm of performance studies encompasses a broader spectrum of performance types. It's really fabulous for a liberal arts holistic student to come into that kind of curricular framework because it opens up horizons as to what avenues of study and performance you can explore; not just traditional theatre dedicated to play scripts for which there's a niche market. What this does is it increases the career and learning opportunities for students. It's such an exciting field that matches up with other trends and interdisciplinarity because performance studies draws on many disciplines: anthropology, psychology, feminist studies, queer studies, social sciences, history, oral history, ethnography. It really fits, I think, this desire to be a broad-based and exploratory thinker in terms of what different opportunities and disciplines can I bring together and explore through this guiding force of performance and human activity. The interesting connection is that, again, Dr. [John S.] Gentile, when he pushed the department more in this direction, when he became chair—his degree [M.A. and Ph.D.] is from Northwestern as well. So, again, you see this confluence of ingredients from Northwestern seems to be an interesting centerpiece.



TS: And he does a lot with folklore and that kind of thing.

KR: Exactly, which is another realm of orality. He's really interested in storytelling. So the fact that I happened to have had this mentor at University of Colorado, Boulder, who is also from there is really interesting synchronicity because I trained in some of the work that he also trained in at Northwestern. So I was right on board when he started guiding the department in this direction.

TS: And then you do dramatic literature as well?

KR: Yes.

TS: And you do Theatre 1107 [Arts in Society: Theatre and Performance].

KR: Right. That was originally one of my primary responsibilities when I came here—to be the coordinator for Theatre 1107.

TS: Which is a General Education course at Kennesaw.

KR: Exactly. Since I'm taking on the administrative assignment of Global Learning Coordinator for the College of the Arts, another colleague of mine [Margaret Baldwin] is doing the [TPS 1107] coordination right now.

TS: What exactly does a global learning coordinator do in theatre?

KR: Well, it's actually a responsibility that also encompasses the Visual Arts department and the School of Music, so it's for the College of the Arts. What happened is when we took this on as our Quality Enhancement plan, the Global Learning for Engaged Citizenship, one of the key infrastructural ingredients was to have a global learning coordinating council that would work with cabinet leadership to communicate, facilitate, and promote global learning throughout the university. When that idea for organizational structure came to the university—and this was when Valerie [D.] Whittlesey and [Akanmu G.] Adebayo, and Ed [Edwin A.] Rugg were leading the beginning of all this—they put out the call for each college to bring forth a coordinator. So my name came up in a list, and I'm really interested and passionate about global learning. So I said, “Yes, I'd be interested in doing that.”

TS: So what exactly do you do in that position?

KR: What I do is I try to instigate and coordinate and facilitate global learning opportunities and strategies within the college.

TS: Like studies abroad to study theatre?

KR: Right, but it wouldn't just be theatre. I do promote it within our whole college, so for visual arts and theatre and music. But, also, not even to necessarily narrow it to that, but

to encourage students to go on a study abroad program. It could be one that was more fully designed of General Education courses, but just getting the students to go abroad....

TS: Which is going to be a lot easier in the future with the fourteen dollar activities fee that students are paying to fund study abroad scholarships.

KR: Exactly. So it's a lot of cheerleading and communication and encouraging and then reporting and documenting and marketing. It's just begun. I've been doing it for a couple of years, but the early years were very organizational for the whole university. Last year was our baseline year. Within our department I'm very much encouraging and promoting projects that involve global material. I and a colleague took a site visit to Casablanca, Morocco, because we were invited to bring a production to a University Theatre Festival there, an international one. So we did a site visit, and now we're going to try to raise the money to take a group of students over there to do the production, but then I want to include some intercultural learning opportunities that go along with that. So that's the project this year. Last year, my individual effort was hugely focused fall semester on bringing the Kenyan Youth Choir Shangilia—it means “rejoice” in Swahili—to the campus for a four-day residency. This acquaintanceship came out of a faculty-learning trip that I took to Kenya in March of 2007. That was the Year of Kenya [at KSU], you may recall, and I and my colleague co-directed an original oral history piece about Kenyans on our stage at our theater. So we were immersed in all things Kenyan because we were interviewing all these Kenyans as part of that project. Then Margaret Baldwin, the playwright, put together the script, and then she and I co-directed it with a cast of Kennesaw students. We both went on this trip to further immerse ourselves in that country. I had been one time before with the university system. While we were there we visited this school; the choir comes from a school that uses performing arts to rehabilitate and empower street children in Nairobi. That's how we met them. Then they were already coming to the United States, but they weren't coming down here. So I worked with the New York producer and the director of the school and then a lot of people here to bring them here on the first leg of the journey. That was my big hands-on project for November 2007.

TS: I think we're doing some exciting stuff now with global learning.

KR: I do too. There are so many things happening you can't keep track of them all.

TS: And with the scholarships there's going to be a lot more students going. Our department chair, [E.] Howard Shealy is off today to Italy for ten weeks.

KR: And our Visual Arts professor [Joseph H. Remillard] is going with him.

TS: Yes. Joe. I guess that's our first full length semester.

KR: I'm really excited about that. I hope to get more College of the Arts students involved in that.

TS: Well, you started here in 2000, and we've grown a bit since 2000.

KR: No kidding.

TS: And the theatre program, I guess, has grown along with everybody else. So why don't you just talk about your teaching because you just won the Distinguished Teaching Award, and maybe talk about your philosophy of teaching, and maybe just the way you go about teaching, your style of teaching.

KR: Okay. I really credit KSU for giving me the time to reflect and develop my style because in my early years of teaching I was thrown into it. I was focused so much on mastering the material that I didn't have reflection time about my style. It emerged gradually over that ten-year period at North Carolina School of the Arts. Then it was emerging but perhaps I didn't have quite a cognizance of what it was. So I came here, and I had some opportunities that gave me time to reflect and write about it and think about it and be more conscious about what I was doing. I wanted to mention one of those early ones—I was invited to be part of a KSU funded group to do the two-year Courage to Teach Program which was initiated by Parker Palmer. It started out where a group of us went to his home . . .

TS: Is that after he came here to speak?

KR: I'm trying to remember the timeline, if he came before this group. I think he did. We had this upsurge, and it was about the time that the CETL Center was getting ready to be fully established. Remember, we had the speakers. He came and then the other teacher whose name is escaping me [Lee S. Shulman], from Carnegie.

TS: From the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching?

KR: Yes. So there was this upsurge . . .

TS: And this was one of the convocations that Betty Siegel put on [in 2002].

KR: Right, she was very instrumental in fact, so Betty Siegel was on this trip, we took a trip to his house.

TS: Yes, Beverly [F.] Mitchell [Associate Dean of Bagwell College of Education] talked about the trip in her interview.

KR: We went to his home and were able to spend two days doing his work with him. Then later on, Betty Siegel was going to fund a two-year program for a group of professors, and since I'd been in that earlier group, I was fortunate enough to be able to go. This is over a two-year period and four sessions each year that correspond with the seasons. We would go up to Amicalola Falls State Park, and then we'd have these sessions for full weekends. I mention that because reading his work and then what we did in those retreats helped me solidify what I value. What is at the centerpiece of Parker

Palmer's work in *Courage to Teach* is collective learning and subject-centered work. I think it does dovetail with learner-centered, but this notion of collective learning and that we all learn together from one another and that you bring yourself into the classroom, your authentic self, I guess, as opposed to some disconnected professor-self, that you bring your authentic self in.

TS: You drop the mystique.

KR: Right, and that you're not holding forth or professing, but you're an instigator and a catalyst and a mutual learner along with the students. So this idea of collective and collaborative learning, which dovetails with my work as a theatre artist because theatre is completely about collaboration; it's not a solo art. That's why I'm in it because I really thrive off of the generation of ideas and inspirations in a group of people—that we then feed off each other through listening and receiving and contributing, and that the subject, whether it's a work of art, a piece of literature, an essay, a piece of music, what-have-you, that's the catalyst. He calls it the Third Thing.

TS: So this is subject-centered, was that the term you used?

KR: Yes, that's what he calls it.

TS: And this is the Third Thing.

KR: The Third Thing is whatever that piece, that artifact, that text, that idea is that becomes the catalyst to generate the process of thinking and feeling and engaging in discourse and enriching your view. I think those ideas are at the heart of it. So I tend to organize my classes in a circle much of the time when we're not doing performances where there's an audience. We are in a circle, and we're all exchanging energy and ideas. It's not that I eliminate offering up of ideas that I've gathered from other sources and the format that one calls a lecture.

TS: Your expertise.

KR: Yes, offering up what I've learned over the years. But that that becomes interwoven. So we might go back and forth between that. I also like this notion of learning through inquiry, which I know is something the Bagwell College of Education uses a lot too. In fact, a woman I think very highly of—Kim [Kimberly S.] Loomis—won one of the Foundation awards [KSU Foundation Prize] for a textbook just the other day. She was on some of these earlier retreats that I went on when I first came to Kennesaw. She's very much a teacher who teaches through inquiry.

TS: What does learning through inquiry mean? You start with a question and then . . . ?

KR: Yes. You start with a question and through working your way through the question you get the students to participate fully in that process of inquiry. She's really brilliant in this. Then you guide whatever the discussion is, maybe through the questions, towards some

discoveries. Then you can reinforce those discoveries with scholarly sources or what-have-you.

TS: It sounds like to me some of these things are what we've done for years. We just maybe haven't thought about what we were doing.

KR: Exactly. And I really credit KSU for giving me different workshop opportunities to start to be able to articulate what it is that I value.

TS: So this scholarship of teaching sounds like an area maybe you've moved into. Have you been writing about this?

KR: Yes, I've written a few things, and I'll continue to write more. For instance, when we created the Kenyan show, part of our whole process was incorporating research and reading that the students had to do about Kenyan culture and Kenyan identity into the rehearsal process. So what we did after that finished is I and the playwright-co-director wrote an essay that we had published in the IGI [Institute for Global Initiatives] special edition journal on Kenya that came out last year [Margaret Baldwin and Karen Robinson, "Ethnographic Performance and Global Learning: Lessons from *You Always Go Home*," Special Edition, *Kenya and the Kenyan Diaspora*, ed. Daniel J. Paracka, *Journal of Global Initiatives*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2007).] So we reflected on that theatrical production experience as global learning and the value of that kind of work. Then I've completed an essay with two other 1107 coordinators [Charlotte Collins from Visual Arts and Edward Eanes from Music] that we wrote about using interdisciplinary arts to teach arts appreciation, so that you combine music and art and theatre, and you make it experiential.

TS: How big are our 1107 classes?

KR: Well, now they are at eighty. We are trying to take them down twenty. They were over one hundred in all three departments for quite some time. One of the aspects of experiential learning that I introduced and then my colleague [Margaret Baldwin] has developed further is that in the theatre class students have to create and then produce and perform a theatre piece. Then when the global learning initiative came into the forefront we dictated that it should be a story from another culture. So that's one of the things as Global Learning Coordinator—I keep encouraging professors to infuse their existing curricula with global learning exercises or texts. So we've done that in that class. I think that experiential learning in the arts is a must, and the students have a different level of engagement. Part of this is the theory of embodiment, which is if you put something in your body—and performance is putting it in your voice and body—you understand it in a fuller and different way. Especially since one of the goals of global learning is to foster understanding and empathy—performing and embodying is one of the surest ways to create empathy in an individual. That's become another theory that's at the heart of my teaching.

TS: Because you've got to immerse yourself into the culture to be able to perform something.

KR: Exactly. And if you think of how you have to take on the emotions and the point of view of an individual and project those without judgments or critique to an audience, then you have to develop empathy in order to be able to do that. So that's a cornerstone of performance studies and one that dovetails completely with my philosophy. I think also part of my philosophy is to be completely open and accessible to the students. In the theatre department, a lot of us, we're there even if we don't have classes. We're there all the time, and we have our doors open because it's such a heavy mentoring kind of discipline. So that kind of accessibility and openness are really important parts of my teaching philosophy, and that willingness to give extra time one-on-one for coaching and whatnot tie into it very much.

TS: Sure. How much do you all do with technology or how much do you do in your teaching?

KR: I use Power Point, and I use the typical media, DVDs and recordings and whatnot; not all of our classrooms over in Theatre are smart classrooms, so that tends to limit it. I had started doing a little accessibility online; I've used the WebCT. Now, what's interesting is I think the current budgetary situation is going to compel us or motivate us all to make use of online resources even more fully. Yes, so I'm not really sophisticated technologically. But I love Power Point because the arts need imagery in order to immerse yourself in them.

TS: You mentioned how large the General Education 1107 class was.

KR: Right, so we brought it down to eighty; we're trying that out this semester.

TS: What about your upper level classes when you do Performance Studies and such?

KR: I teach one of the lower division performance studies classes, and that has a capacity of twenty in it. With attrition it'll be a little less than that. Then our acting classes—and I'm teaching an auditioning practicum class, that is at thirteen or fourteen because if you're going to do that hands-on work, and we made this case to our dean for those acting classes, you really have to keep the class size down, especially since at KSU we don't have studio length classroom time. The hour [and] fifteen [minutes], we still have that because we're staying on the grid.

TS: Right. You have to conform to the campus schedule.

KR: Right. Other campuses for acting classes will have two-hour slots. We don't have that right now, unless we do it once a week, but then it's only once a week. So, yes, we try to keep within that realm. It balances out in terms of head counts with the higher numbers in our lower division.

TS: Kind of like in music where they've got individual instruction in guitar or whatever; do you have anything like that in theatre?

KR: We don't, and if we did we would need to balance it out the way the School of Music does. The way they pay for it is the students that receive individual instruction are required to be in ensembles. So they generate their credit hour money trade off through the students being in the ensembles. I think that's how they subsidize the one-on-one.

TS: I see. Well, in your case, like students that are taking an acting class are performing in plays outside the class?

KR: If they get cast. For instance, the first week of our semester, last week, we had auditions for all of our fall shows. So if they get cast they will be performing. And it's challenging for our demographic because so many of them work thirty to forty hours a week or they have families. So they have to figure out how they can balance doing their coursework and being in a production.

TS: I would think it would be pretty demanding.

KR: Yes, it's basically like having two full time jobs as a student and as a teacher. We do have a course reassignment if we direct a production, but truth be told, directing a production really takes more time than teaching a course. I'm directing a production next semester, so you just "gird your loins" for really long days.

TS: Right. What are some of the productions you've put on since you've been here at Kennesaw?

KR: At Kennesaw? As I mentioned I did the Molière production of—*The Learned Ladies* is the original name about these women who want to be independent intellectuals, but it was a reconception of that that this translator [Ranjit Bolt] created called *The Sisterhood* because he updated it and then I updated it to a different time period. I directed Brian Friel, the Irish playwright's play, *Translations*; I directed *Boy Gets Girl*, which is by a contemporary American playwright named Rebecca Gilman. That was a really fulfilling project because we linked with the Wellness Center because it's a play about a woman who starts getting stalked by a man. We linked with the Wellness Center in terms of these kinds of issues, and the campus police. We want to keep doing that because I believe that theatre shouldn't be just an aesthetic end in itself, but it should be a means for educating our students in a multi-disciplinary way and for changing the world, making the world a better place. I co-directed the Kenya play called *You Always Go Home*, that I was speaking of earlier; I directed some short [Samuel] Beckett pieces that I put into an evening with collected shorts by Beckett—student directors also participated in that evening. So that was a great project.

TS: Say something about our students.

KR: Oh, *Monkey King*, I directed *Monkey King* that we took to Shanghai. That was an original adaptation of the Chinese folk novel, a portion of it.

TS: How did it go over in Shanghai?

KR: It went over great! In fact, I and two of the co-collaborators are writing an essay about that right now to try and collect our reflections and strategies and thoughts and put them into words. Yes, that went over really well. It was another affirmation of how theatre really is a catalyst for building cultural bridges. Again, it's that Parker Palmer—theatre becomes the third thing because it becomes the catalyst for dialogue you would never have if you didn't have experiencing that production in common. So organically what happens is you start going off into conversations about values and about interpretation that wouldn't as easily, perhaps, happen if you were starting the conversation from scratch.

TS: Right. Say something about our students: are they mainly traditional aged students or non-traditional. You mentioned a lot of them work.

KR: It's a combination. We have quite a combination, although, as I'm sure you have observed, once we started adding the living quarters—I know we don't call them dormitories, residence halls—that we are having a larger proportion of traditional aged. In the theatre department we're having a larger proportion of freshmen living on campus, but we also have older students, some students who are in their mid-twenties; we have one student who is sixty-plus years old, and he's doing this as his second career; other students who are married and have children of varying ages, thirties and forties; students who come back after being away. So we do have a mix, although, probably proportionately, we have more young students, more students in their twenties.

TS: It sounds to me like some of our music programs are pretty selective on who can get in.

KR: They are becoming more that way because . . .

TS: What about theatre?

KR: No, what we're trying to do because of the way, the market for theatre . . .

TS: I interrupted your sentence, you had a "because," and I cut you off.

KR: Oh, because that's the direction the School of Music wants to take. They want to take a direction into the training of professional musicians, and then they also have their Music Ed for the educators.

TS: But that's not your philosophy?

KR: We're a little different. Visual Arts is into professional programs as well; they have the BFA. We're different, and we're deliberately this way because of what we know the market for theatre can bear. There are already enough professional training programs in the country for a job market for a profession that is very competitive and the openings are very small in number. So what really makes more sense for us to do is to maintain our BA identity, so that our goal is to provide our students with a really rich, in terms of



breadth and depth, holistic education in Theatre and Performance Studies along with their Gen Ed that then prepares them if they want to make the choice to go into graduate study or they want to make the choice to go to a professional training program or they want to make the choice to go work in the corporate world. Human resources love people who have trained in theatre—human resource departments—because they have become really good collaborators. Or business, we encourage a lot of our BA students to minor or take related studies in the College of Business, in management or marketing, so we're really on the same page, our faculty, about that because we know, from being in the profession, that it's really fooling our kids to say we're going to give you professional training and then you're going to be allowed to go out and get a job because the odds are slim. So what we try to offer is a real solid balance of theory and practice; they have book classes where they have to learn to read closely and write well. We have writing across the curriculum in our program. Then also hands-on do-it classes where they have to create performance projects.

TS: Right. That sounds like the same thing in history that we're preparing people to write, think, get along with other people, and understand other people better, so that they go out to the business world or work for government, not necessarily in the field of history although we do have a Public History program.

KR: Yes, that seems like that's growing.

TS: Yes, it's growing a little bit. I think it's popular among those that want to do something in the history field, but don't want to teach in the public schools.

KR: Yes.

TS: They want to do another kind of teaching like you do in a museum or a national park or something like that. It sounds like your philosophy is very similar to ours in that regard.

KR: It does sound that way.

TS: One thing that we've asked everybody who has received the Distinguished Teaching Award is how you would define a master teacher?

KR: Oh, that's a good question.

TS: That's a Bill Hill question.

KR: Yes. Okay, here goes. I think a master teacher, to state what may be obvious at the forefront, is somebody who is a master at the craft of teaching and the art. I should call it a craft and art because I think it involves skills and inspiration. So skills in communicating clearly and openly and eloquently and articulately with the students, and I say with, because I don't think it should be unidirectional, that there should be a flow of information that cycles back because a master teacher is someone who is always learning, a lifelong learner, or has a passion for lifelong learning that he or she models for the

students. I think a master teacher has standards of excellence that include never resting with existing knowledge, but always seeking more knowledge and experience and then ideas about how to share that knowledge and experience in a way that provides inspiration and sparks a desire to do the same in another.

TS: To what extent, the ideas about how to share knowledge and experience, are you thinking with students, with colleagues, with both?

KR: With both; absolutely with both because I think a master teacher is open to learning from all kinds of sources. I have had a blessed professional life in terms of the collaborative learning relationships I've had with colleagues. I've team taught a lot, and I've shared and discussed ideas about teaching and source materials with colleagues throughout my career: at Wake Forest, at North Carolina School of the Arts, at KSU, at Georgia Shakespeare. So, yes, colleagues, students, and I think the world around you. This is something I think a master teacher, for my field, is someone—your powers of observation need to be really keen because the subject matter is human nature in theatre arts and performance. So everybody and every action and behavior around you is a source for more inspiration and learning in both the process of the discipline itself, but also the art of communication that's so important to learning. I think also empathy is really important for a master teacher, and I think that takes a real act of will power when you're tired and you've been working really hard and students have their needs and sometimes those needs won't seem entirely reasonable. So to try and look at it from [their perspective].

TS: That's very good. What kind of team-teaching have you done? Team-teaching with what kinds of other instructors?

KR: Last term I team taught with my colleagues in the School of Music and the Department of Visual Arts [Charlotte Collins and Edward Eanes]. We team taught an interdisciplinary 1107 course focusing on the arts in New Orleans. We did that. That was the modus operandi that I promoted when I first came into the 1107 job. They were already team teaching; back then we had super sections of 300 plus that would fill the whole theater, so there would be four teachers. But they weren't really team teaching. One person would do a lecture one day, another would do a lecture the next day, so when I got there I said, "Let's really team teach; let's tag, let's model a dynamic discussion amongst ourselves as part of the way we teach in the classroom." So we did that for a while, and for various reasons we don't do that any more, but it worked really well for a while.

TS: So you loaded up the Stillwell Theater.

KR: Yes, we would have four faculty for 300 plus students, and that was a way of us effectively using the number of faculty members that we had at that time, which was just five, plus adjuncts, but nonetheless we had less people than we have now. We have ten full time now. I team taught in the praxis classes. A directing and acting Shakespeare class—I team taught with another professor. He was the acting styles teacher, and I was the directing styles teacher.

TS: That seems a logical combination.

KR: Yes. I really enjoy team teaching. It's unfortunate that the economics doesn't always support it because it's a real rich source of learning from each other and from the students and with the students.

TS: How is the new addition that's under construction now going to affect your theatre program?

KR: It's really going to help us because it is going to house a 125-seat black box theater. Right now we have a black box theater that seats 50 people. It's tiny. It's really a tiny classroom that was never meant to be a theater.

TS: Is that over in the Music building?

KR: It's in the Wilson building, which we share with Music.

TS: Oh, where is it in the Wilson building?

KR: It's behind the main theater, if you were to go down the hall behind the main theater. Yes, it really is a classroom painted black.

TS: Okay. I guess I haven't ever seen it.

KR: I know, it's stuck there in a little corner. So just the visibility factor will help us.

TS: So you'll have a much bigger theater.

KR: Yes, it will really help support that series of productions we put in there. We tend to put edgier or more experimental material in the black box stage than the main stage.

TS: That you hope that the newspapers don't hear about!

KR: We're bursting at the seams. We're just lucky that the fire marshal doesn't come in and corner us with this tiny black box. So that's really going to help us very much. And the fact that we have that facility is going to be attractive to future students as well.

TS: Theatre performances can be controversial can't they?

KR: Yes, we've had a few of those here.

TS: I guess you were here when *The Grapes of Wrath* was here.

KR: Yes, yes, yes, I was.

TS: Were you involved with that?

KR: I wasn't, no. Just as a fellow faculty member supporting the project. And then we were a little controversial when we did the faculty reading of *Lips Together, Teeth Apart*, because that had a history.

TS: Oh, at the Theatre in the Square.

KR: Right, and it had a history of being involved in the conflict between the public funding issue and material that didn't promote family values when ironically that play doesn't have anything directly controversial in it. But the mere fact of that title made people nervous when we were choosing to celebrate its tenth anniversary because it did promote the community getting into an important dialogue when that controversy occurred. But it turned out being a really fulfilling experience and audience members really enjoyed it.

TS: Part of the purpose of theatre is to make people think.

KR: Exactly. We have our whole list of functions of the theatre that we always introduce in our introductory classes, and that's one—to provoke thought or to challenge existing values.

TS: You have to do something controversial sometimes.

KR: To get people talking about things that they don't necessarily want to think about. To have difficult dialogues. Yes.

TS: Why don't you talk about Kennesaw State generally of your impression when you came here in 2000. I guess you'd heard of us before then, but maybe your impression—2000 is not that long ago—but your impression at that time and what you think about the intellectual life of the campus today.

KR: Okay. When I first got here it was very much of an academic institution kind of culture shock because I came from an institution that was very full of students who were very focused and committed to the study at hand with the professional training. So there was that kind of dedication and full time commitment. Even if they weren't always committed to my academic classes, they were committed to being there and following their years of study through. So I came here in January of 2000 and encountered an entirely different demographic—a demographic which contained a larger proportion of non-traditional students at that point, which I love the non-traditional students because they usually were committed, but what I would have were these classrooms of really heterogeneous students who had varying degrees of commitment and tended, many of them, to either not really care or to not be very strong students in terms of either the skills that they were bringing into the classroom and/or their work ethics. And yet there would be these gems within that demographic, so that was really difficult. And here I come with my standards of commitment and excellence and passionate intensity about my

subject matter and would sometimes meet with a resistance or a resentment that I was holding them to certain standards.

TS: This is more the 1107 or are you talking about . . . ?

KR: This was particularly the 1107, absolutely, and more so, but even within the theatre major.

TS: Many of whom are just plugging in a course that the catalog says you have to do.

KR: You do, that just comes with that terrain.

TS: But you're saying also among the majors?

KR: But also among the majors. There was this really committed, devoted core group right before I came I heard from my colleagues. By the time I came, many of them had left and there were just a few left. There's ebb and flow in programs. I came during an ebb time, and it was difficult because I didn't perceive a high degree of skill or commitment or passion in the students there. There were a lot of really capricious kinds of personalities. What I've observed is a great change since then. I think it's tied into a number of factors, but the change itself is that we have larger numbers of students coming in who are committed, who come with a higher level of skills both in writing and reading and oral communication and degree of passion and interest. This could be tied into the fact that since I've been here the SAT minimum has been raised. One of the things that theatre in particular depends on is a culture of community and ensemble, and it's nigh impossible to develop that if it's purely a commuter campus. Now we have beds on campus, so we have a larger number of students who live on campus. So they're here being together, spending time together, and they're creating that culture where they learn and support and feed each other's commitment. We're seeing the fact that as a faculty we've grown, and we have finessed our curriculum and our values and the standards to which we hold the students, but we can do that more now because we have stronger students. For instance, our writing standards and the assignments we require in class and the balance of writing, reading and performance even in our praxis classes. So that even in an acting class, which could easily just be a class that kids come in and do scene work and it's got this sense of play which it should have, but maybe not the more rigorous academic component of researching and writing about the role. We've got more of that solidified, so it works together because we're asking more and requiring more, and the students are having to give us more, and they're rising to the occasion. If they choose not to rise to the occasion they will go. But then that means our upper division students are stronger. So we're seeing the pay-off for the fact that we've worked with them. We're coordinating our efforts from the introductory class to the senior seminar, and AOL [campus-wide Assessment of Learning initiative] helps with this in terms of what we're asking them to do at each level that becomes a stepping stone to what we want them to be able to do at the senior level.

TS: Very good.

KR: And we work really well together, our faculty does. So I think it's a combination of a number of factors. I also think the reputation of Kennesaw State University has really grown since I've been here.

TS: People have discovered us?

KR: Yes. And as far as the intellectual community here, I think it's outstanding. I think the professors here are amazing. I think everybody is involved in so many interesting projects, and you're given the opportunity to commingle with people through committees, but also some of these CETL learning opportunities. This is where you start to find out about what other people are doing, and it's really amazing. I think the faculty here is really top notch.

TS: What about professional service and how that fits in? Are you doing anything theatre related in terms of service or professional organizations and so on?

KR: Most of my professional service has been on our campus, but I also do professional service with the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, which is, as it sounds, a consortium of the universities. You can participate in this festival. It's divided into regions. You bring productions or students to the regional conferences. The organization needs, among other things, respondents to go to different university productions and to respond and to offer—what you do is you go and you watch the production. They enter it into this competition or a partial entry to offer students opportunities to compete as actors. You go and you watch the show and then you talk to the students afterwards. You give specific responses to the work in terms of their successes, their strengths, and those kinds of productive, encouraging feedback. So I participate as a respondent with that organization. I also participate for the Southeastern Theatre Conference, which is another set of conferences and consortium. There are screening auditions that each state holds for students who want to pursue summertime work. They need judges and jurists for those screenings, so I do that kind of work. I've done professional service with Georgia Shakespeare where I've been a casting associate. I assist with casting. Every summer I go and teach at Mercer Senior University. It is such a fabulous experience. This is this whole program throughout the year for seniors, and they take these classes for their personal enrichment. We always link Georgia Shakespeare with them, so I go and teach sessions about a particular play on which I'm working. I'm probably leaving something out.

TS: Do you do much with the public schools?

KR: I haven't done much with the public schools, but that is something that I will probably do more of in terms of wanting to offer workshops and such for some of these public school theatre programs.

TS: It sounds like you've been staying very busy.

KR: It's not hard is it?!

TS: What have we left out that we should have talked about do you think?

KR: Well, one thing I did want to mention just because of you saying that you were going to do this—I realized, it snuck up on me, that teaching is a part of my family, and I wanted to make a tribute to my grandfather.

TS: The one from Northwestern?

KR: Yes. When I told my parents about this award, they told my aunt, who is my father's sister, and she called up and left a message on my phone machine. She mentioned this tradition of teaching in our family, which I hadn't really consciously thought of because she, too, has been a teacher—she's retired now but she still tutors.

TS: What's her name?

KR: Her name is Frances Harrison. But she's my father's sister. It's interesting, he's named after his father, and she's named after her mother. But she taught for over thirty years in Los Angeles, a third grade teacher, so she was reminding me that I was carrying on the tradition. And then my grandfather taught at Northwestern for twenty-one years.

TS: What did he teach?

KR: He taught speech education. It was the first, I asked my father a question about this because I wanted to make sure—it was a good impetus to ask this question—and he said that at that time it was the School of Speech. He taught at Northwestern from '44 until '65, and the School of Speech was always its own separate school. There were five, I guess, departments in it: Drama, Public Speaking, Correction, Radio and Television, and Speech Education. The latter was where he taught, and it was his own field that he created. Ironically, he left Northwestern because they had an obligatory retirement age of sixty-five, and in California schools you could go till seventy. So he moved to California. So many branches of my family wound up in California. He taught at Cal State Hayward, which now has a different name; it's called California State University, East Bay. He was professor of speech and drama and coordinator of graduate studies. They named a hall after him.

TS: Is your father a Karl, Jr.?

KR: No, he isn't.

TS: What's your grandfather's name?

KR: It's Karl, but he never had a Jr. after his name. I don't know why, but he doesn't.

TS: But your grandfather was Karl Willard?

KR: No, my father was Karl Willard. My grandfather was Karl, and you know what, I don't know his middle name.

TS: But it wasn't Willard.

KR: He died when I was only twelve, which was before I decided I was going to become a teacher. So I just really am entranced by that unconscious thread and the fact that he was involved in speech and drama and taught college.

TS: I guess so. You didn't have any choice.

KR: I know. I think it's really a calling. Then my brother just got his master's a few years ago, in education. His name is Dean Robinson. He hasn't started teaching full time because he's raising a family. He's basically been a substitute and taught workshops, but he's teaching as well.

TS: It's in the blood.

KR: Yes. So I wanted to mention that.

TS: That's wonderful. I think I've just about run out of questions.

KR: Okay.

TS: I certainly enjoyed the interview today.

KR: I did too. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity.

TS: You're welcome.



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