

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH SABINE H. SMITH

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for the

KSU ORAL HISTORY SERIES, NO. 90

FRIDAY, 21 AUGUST 2009

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
KSU Oral History Series, No. 90  
Interview with Sabine H. Smith  
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott  
Friday, 21 August 2009  
Location: CETL House, Kennesaw State University

TS: Today the interview is with Sabine Smith who received the Distinguished Teaching Award in 2009. Sabine, why don't we just start by you talking about your background, where you grew up and went to school? All your profile talks about is from master's level on, but doesn't say anything before then, so why don't you talk about yourself?

SHS: All right. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. I grew up in Germany. I grew up in the central part of western Germany, born in the early 1960s in a post-war reconstruction era of Germany in a pretty dysfunctional family that, however, valued education as a ticket to the world and a ticket to accomplishment and success. I went through the public school system because private schooling was hardly an option for anybody, and it was not really available anyway. I was, I guess, normal enough that I made it through the public school system all right. After elementary school in the local suburb, I went to the center of the city to a school that my parents organized for me to be able to go to via a special arrangement so that I could start with my first foreign language being French. They were neighbors with a teacher of French who pushed them to pursue this because he felt that French was the harder language to start with than English.

TS: Harder than English?

SHS: Harder than English, and that's why I should start with French. Of course, he was a teacher so he believed strongly in that, and as he was a neighbor they followed his advice.

TS: Do you think that's true?

SHS: I love languages, and I think I see the challenges and the opportunities in all of them. I'm grateful that I started with French because it was something different, and I think that fit my personality. I wanted to do from very early on things that were different that were not the ordinary or the easiest way, and so I began with French and had a total of nine years during high school, which made me pretty much fluent. It allowed me also the opportunity to go on exchange programs early on, and that was my ticket to the world that I use and have used since then, the foreign language as a jumping board to go visit foreign countries and learn about foreign cultures.

TS: I was going to say, from Germany it's not that far to go to get to France.

SHS: No, no. But most people, including myself, actually had the first encounter with English and the English speaking world, because my family took us to the English speaking world, first to Ireland, and then I went on a summer school trip to England. Because of the history too there was a lot of school effort to build the friendly relations between

youth, between France and Germany. There were exchange programs that we benefited from. My first trip alone, entirely on my own, was to a French family for six weeks to the French countryside, and that began sort of a long journey of individual travel.

TS: Let me back up a little bit. Were your parents native German speakers?

SHS: Yes, both of them were native German speakers. My mother was a refugee from the Sudetenland with her widowed mother herself.

TS: A refugee from when Hitler took over?

SHS: Yes, after World War II they were kicked out by the Czechs.

TS: Oh, afterwards—because they were Germans?

SHS: Exactly. So they were refugees from the Sudetenland.

TS: Wasn't the Sudetenland overwhelming German?

SHS: The Sudetenland was overwhelmingly German, exactly.

TS: So they kicked everybody out?

SHS: Pretty much, yes, or they killed them.

TS: My goodness.

SHS: This was in the final war days, World War II, and my grandmother told me the story that they had fifteen minutes to pack up their belongings when the Czech soldiers knocked on their doors, and they basically walked to eastern Germany at the time. My mother was young; she was I guess ten or eleven years old. They first had a lay over several years in eastern Germany and then before the Wall was built escaped to West Germany. That's where my mother met my father and settled in West Germany in the town of Wiesbaden, that's my home town. It's a spa resort close to Frankfurt, Germany, a nineteenth century gambling town for rich Americans—a very pleasant place in which to grow up.

TS: So you got a chance to talk to people speaking English then.

SHS: Yes, certainly.

TS: What was your mother's name?

SHS: Hannelore Walig. My father's name was Heinz Stoll.

TS: What was the last name, the family name?

SHS: Walig and Stoll, respectively.

TS: So your mother's family was always from the Sudetenland?

SHS: Yes, the German speaking part.

TS: Sure. Why did they go to eastern Germany?

SHS: Because that was the closest and they had relatives there. They stayed there until it became clear that there was more opportunity in the west, and the restrictions became harsher.

TS: Of course, when they first went there you still had those military zones, I guess, and it wasn't so obvious that the Cold War was setting in, I suppose.

SHS: Yes. They escaped in the night through the No Man's Land, but apparently it was already tense enough that there were patrolling guards with live ammunition shooting at refugees.

TS: Well, now, the Wall doesn't go up until '61. When would it have been that they would have escaped?

SHS: I'm not entirely sure but it must have been '56, maybe '54, right around that time.

TS: About the time that the Russians were rolling in the tanks into Hungary.

SHS: That's right.

TS: There was a riot in eastern Germany about '53 wasn't there?

SHS: Yes, '53, and I think that was the onset of the crackdown and the more rigid controlling that became a burden for the people who did not want to see history repeat itself.

TS: So they basically fled twice?

SHS: Yes.

TS: That had to be an experience for your mother growing up and having to flee twice as a child. Or was she still a child by that time?

SHS: Well, a young adult. I think she talked about... certainly her experience as a deprived child who then, when she ended up in the west, had for the first time a job and money... that she started eating and had experiences like chewing gum and chocolate... and was sort of unbridled because it was supplied and she gained a lot of weight and subsequently lost it again because there were all the beauty pressures as well. She didn't talk a lot about the past, but enough to communicate that it was a difficult childhood, definitely.

TS: What did your father do?

SHS: My father grew up in rural western Germany, and he had very modest, almost poor family background. His father had lost an eye early on as a young man and worked in the local quarry in this area. He didn't participate, because of his loss of an eye, in World War I, even though he had been old enough, but became, before the Nazi regime started, an ardent advocate for the Social Democrats and thus became a pretty vocal critic of Hitler. Interestingly enough, he was very much respected in the local community as a lobbyist for Social Democrats, for unionists, and very much of a respected citizen even though he wasn't very rich. But my father at the time was a teenager, and he rebelled against my grandfather and volunteered to join the *Wehrmacht* and went into the war very much to the chagrin of my grandparents. He became a POW in France with the Americans and returned after the war to finish the very basic schooling that was available to him at the time by completing a vocational trade school. There was not even a university or even a formal high school. He went into the government business of being a tax police officer. Basically, he followed the rich guys to all these wonderful places. He was one of the first in his village who had a car, and "had made it" in the eyes of his fellow villagers because he could travel to Italy and to Switzerland and chase after the big capitalists. He lived in the big city where he then met my mother.

TS: Sounds like he was considerably older than your mother.

SHS: He was about nine years older than my mother.

TS: Oh, so not that big of a difference then. You referred to the area around Wiesbaden where you were growing up as a post reconstruction era. How post is it? Was there a lot of destruction during the War in that community?

SHS: That's interesting too, because Wiesbaden, is, as I said a nineteenth century resort town that the Americans had always liked because it's very pleasant, it's at the river Rhine, and there is beautiful architecture that was built at the turn of the century when the Prussians had won the war against the French. That reconstruction money went into beautiful, glorious buildings that would give credit to Wilhelm's government. During WWII the Americans dropped leaflets onto the citizens of Wiesbaden saying we'll destroy Mainz, which was the city across the river, an old university and bishop town. The leaflets said we'll destroy Mainz, but we will want to live in Wiesbaden. That's what they in fact did because one of the American headquarters then became Wiesbaden. Because of the city's appeal the head commander, the head chief of arms, settled in Wiesbaden in a suburb adjacent to ours. When I say post reconstruction era, it's more the miracle economic years of Germany where the Germans, in order to, I guess, come to terms with the horrific events of the twentieth century Nazi regime past, thrust themselves into work and into material belongings because everything was rubble around them. When I say Wiesbaden was saved, there was a definite part that was destroyed, but there was less destruction in comparison, let's say, to Frankfurt which was 95 percent destroyed. Cologne, Hamburg, Dresden, I mean, all of these cities were basically flattened.

TS: Wasn't Mainz flattened?

SHS: Mainz was pretty much flattened, too, although I'm not as sure about how much was destroyed because the Germans in many cities rebuilt according to the original plans the original buildings. When you're in Frankfurt right now, you have a city center that is a recreation of the seventeenth and eighteenth century buildings, but they were in fact rebuilt after the war. So I'm not sure what's original in Mainz or what isn't, but the point I was trying to make is that the spirit at the time was such that we can't come to terms with what happened, and we need to look forward. The only things that we have are basically the bootstraps from which we need to pick ourselves up, and that is to get a roof over our heads, to get the first refrigerator, to get the first car, to get the first apartment that you don't share with refugees or strangers, and to get the basic accessories of dignified life back, and to put a band aid on all the other wounds that were covered up.

TS: Did your father continue to be politically involved after World War II?

SHS: Yes and no. While we were growing up, he became politically engaged with a conservative party, nothing radical at all, but he became locally active in our suburb and became eventually the mayor of that suburb.

TS: I'd say he was politically active then.

SHS: He was politically active. It was very controversial in my family, because he was a very hard worker; he was somebody who was politically definitely committed, and I think paid the price of not being available as a family man to the extent that potentially he thought he needed or wanted to. As our family became more dysfunctional with my mother who became an alcoholic, he stepped back from politics and then basically just focused on his work and his family and trying to preserve that.

TS: Well, with you growing up in the 1960s, or really in the 1970s, I guess, if you were born in the 1960s....

SHS: In 1963.

TS: You missed out on all those radicals of the 1960s, I guess.

SHS: To some extent. I think I benefited or was challenged by them because the radicals of the 1960s became my teachers in the 1970s. That again was an interesting way of experiencing it, because I was too young to really become politically aware of the Vietnam War or of the very turbulent times even in Germany that rocked the boat of the miracle years' experience, because the Germans themselves became very critical of the status quo. In daily life, I remember the 1970s and even the 1980s as being not necessarily the peaceful Germany that we picture or remember; there were terrorist attacks, there were anarchic groups, there were assassinations, and there were bomb threats.

TS: The Munich Olympics, when was that?

SHS: In 1972. That's right. I remember distinctly coming home from school that day, and people were stunned. People were horrified, but it drove home the point that even with what had become at that point a pretty affluent society, not all was well in the state of Germany. I was referring to the teachers that I had. This became an interesting experience for me as well... growing up in school at a time when the young people became increasingly more inquisitive as to what their parent generation had done during the war years and what their involvement had been. We talk about "the literature of the fathers" – that young people would question, you know, "What did you do during the War, father?" That generation came to professional appointments when I was in high school, and so we talked about the Holocaust and about the Third Reich in almost every subject. In German, in music, in art, we were talking about degenerate art, degenerate music, Hitler music, Nazi art. When I would come home from school during high school in particular, my father would always ask me, "What did you learn in school?" And...

TS: ..."What did those radicals teach you?"

SHS: Exactly. And I would, of course, tell him what we had learned. We would have many, many ugly, ugly lunches where he would criticize, debate, question what they had told us and say, "I was there, and it wasn't like that." That became a real burden for many years to the point where I don't remember any conversation about that topic that didn't end up in tears and screaming, shouting... because we couldn't agree on what was the right way of reflecting on history.

TS: Gives you a good sense that history depends on who's telling the story doesn't it?

SHS: Absolutely.

TS: I'm wondering, of course, the State of Georgia and the South went through a reconstruction and had to reconcile with slavery, but they did it in a way where they maintained their beliefs in white supremacy, but I'm wondering if there's a parallel with the post civil rights generation in the South. I don't know whether it's happened or not, but I'm wondering if kids went home and their parents asked them what they talked about in school—"Well, we talked about the civil rights movement," and, "No, it wasn't that way."

SHS: Yes, I would think so. It became for me something where I tried to distance myself from my father and get my knowledge from sources that I would be able to verify or trust as scholarly, but I've always been interested in the personal narrative of history and how it's been experienced. I do think that there was an interesting evolution in this as well because in the first years after World War II, it was too big to be talked about.

TS: Denial?

SHS: Maybe not denial but at least an incapacity to verbalize or to put into concepts. There were some efforts early on to commemorate the victims, to commemorate the survivors, but it certainly didn't find entry into the school curriculum. But during the 1960s and then significantly in the late 1970s with an American television series, "The Holocaust," that was screened on public television in Germany, for the first time we had the platform of people being allowed to call in and ask questions about the fictional representation with scholars. There was just this boom of Holocaust literature and questioning and concern with how to come to grips with these events, which in some ways eclipsed the experience of the ordinary German who may have experienced the Holocaust in a different way when they were part of the majority culture in Germany because they were not affected by it or not exposed to it to this extent. I want to be very careful to represent this right, not to defend my father or anything like that, but there was a pendulum swing from not talking about it at all to trying to really talk about it and to make sure that the next generation would hear about it in all its complexity. The more public the discourse became, the more people like my father either fell silent about their involvement or their guilt, or they became more vocal. That became a real interesting tension that I think I resolved to some extent by going away and by leaving the country.

TS: And yet you father was really of a party that was opposed to the Nazis.

SHS: My grandfather was opposed to the Nazis yes.

TS: But not so much your father?

SHS: I think he was ... what? – born in 1927, so when the war was over, he was eighteen years old. He was not a kid, but by the time he was initiated into the Nazi culture he was definitely a young kid, susceptible to the talk, susceptible to the propaganda, and I think out of a more youthful rebellion and also seeing what the Nazis offered to people in his group, being the insider group of the "Aryan" Germans, he saw that this was a movement that might allow him to leave the village, to move into the world, to get out and do something grand and important, and he jumped on the band wagon.

TS: Yes, I missed that part from the grandfather to the father.

SHS: Yes.

TS: So you were taught by people who were revolting against the generation of their parents.

SHS: Absolutely, that was the next generation, definitely.

TS: So you'd be of that generation, even though you were being taught by them.

SHS: I'm sort of in between because my parents were pretty old. I'm technically the second generation after, but they were rather young in the War. As I read more about this population, there are interesting stories, but basically from generation to generation, the experience changes to some extent, but there are definitely still the shadows of the past



that are cast on our existence. Everybody in my generation is still trying to figure out, I think, to what extent we have been influenced by that as well.

TS: Any mentors that stand out when you were going through school?

SHS: Yes, absolutely. As I said, I gravitated toward foreign languages early on, and that's where I derived a lot of mentoring, of people who had traveled to other countries, who had studied literature, in particular, of other cultures. I remember my French teachers, of course, but also my English teachers. My English teacher in high school was the one who brought me to the United States for the first time. I will never forget that first time when I came to the U.S. because it was an instant falling in love and a passion.

TS: What year was that?

SHS: This was 1980. I was seventeen years old, and I was in a high school student exchange program with Nashville, Tennessee. We spent three weeks, but even coming to Atlanta on an outing from Nashville, Tennessee, and also going to New York City... and.... seeing the United States for the first time was just a phenomenal experience.

TS: Wow. 1980, the year Ronald Reagan got elected president.

SHS: Absolutely.

TS: So you were very favorably impressed with the U.S.?

SHS: Yes.

TS: What impressed you?

SHS: Well, I lived with a high school teacher in what seemed an antebellum house in Nashville, Tennessee. It was all brick and had white columns in front. It had a fabulous staircase to the center foyer. It had five bathrooms because they had three daughters. It had a lawn, which he mowed with a rider mower. There were no fences around the lawns and the space, the size!

TS: Suburbs in Germany didn't necessarily mean big lawns.

SHS: No. You had postage sized lawns. But I think the space was, for me, reflective of the freedom and the tolerance and the space that you would give the individual, and that's what I really appreciated from early on in my experience in the U.S. that in this family that was not terribly rich, even though they had this big house, there was laughter and—he was a music teacher—there was song. I remember fondly that the host mother who was a stay-at-home mom even though she worked as a seamstress, would have long conversations with her daughters on the very thickly carpeted steps of this beautiful home. It was just a slower pace of life that was very much interpersonally focused, and it seemed like a healthy family. I was like a kid in a candy store.

TS: Do you remember what their names were?

SHS: Yes. They were the Spensers, David and Deloris Spenser, and they had three daughters, and one of them became my exchange sister.

TS: So she went to Germany while you came to America?

SHS: Well, actually I came to stay with them during Easter vacation, and I had a fabulous time, returned, and in the interim and in the subsequent weeks, my mother's alcoholism and depression had gotten much worse, and she actually committed suicide a few weeks after that. We deliberated as a family, because I had my father and my brother still, whether my exchange sister should still come. We decided that she would, despite the circumstances, and we had a pretty wonderful time because in some ways it was relieved by the burden of the dysfunctional mother and helped me overcome much of the grieving. For three more subsequent years I went back to Nashville to stay with the host family who became a second family to me. My host mother had even the same birthday as my mother, and she was a strong mentor for me during those very turbulent teenage years in my life.

TS: Okay, did you get a bachelor's degree or did you go straight through into a master's?

SHS: In Germany you graduated from high school, and you picked your degree track. There was no undergraduate program at the time. They're beginning to look at this and revise the curriculum to more and more copy the American system, but at the time you had to make the decision: do you want to become a doctor, a lawyer, or in my case an American Studies major? I picked the American Studies major and went to Mainz University and .

TS: Which is an ancient university isn't it?

SHS: Yes, it's pretty old. It's not the oldest, but it's named after Johannes Gutenberg who was the inventor of the printing press, and that happened in Mainz. Given the nature that you have to choose your track, and then you study all the way up to the MA degree, making a life decision at age nineteen, I was a typical case.... American Studies was pretty much clear to me, even though my friends said, "Why don't you become a lawyer or a doctor? You have the high school degree; you certainly could go for these money-making professions." But I was already determined that I wanted to become an American Studies major. I asked my father at the time, and he said, "If your passion is in it, if your head and heart are really wanting to go that route, chances are you're always going to be better than others. If you make the compromise and go into a profession that you're not really into, chances are, you're probably not going to succeed as well."

TS: Sounds like good advice.

SHS: Yes. I followed his advice and went into American Studies and have never regretted it.

TS: Okay, you went straight through then, I guess, and in 1989—do I have my years right, 1989 for your master's?

SHS: Yes. I had become an American Studies major and spent intermittently one year as a TA and undergraduate student at Middlebury College in Vermont. Because I had spent three summers in Nashville, Tennessee, I thought it was time to branch out and see a different part of America. So from 1984 to 1985 I spent an entire year working and studying at this wonderful liberal arts college, Middlebury, and went back to Germany and finished my MA with a concentration in Spanish and Latin American studies. I spent a summer in Spain, but pretty much used every opportunity to come back to the States whenever I could. In preparation for my MA thesis I spent a summer at Duke University researching in a rare book room nineteenth century dime novels for the topic of my master's thesis. I graduated with a master's in 1989. I was on the doctoral program track and applied for a one-year lectureship that was intended to allow me to teach in an English department composition classes, both to refine my English, but also to get a break from the university life and a smacking of what real life teaching would be like.

TS: Sure.

SHS: I went to California and spent a year there, and in that first year . . .

TS: And you didn't get away?

SHS: Didn't get away. My doctor father sat me down before I left and said, "We've had this exchange program with UC Davis for twenty-six years; you're number twenty-seven. Twenty-five haven't come back. I want to warn you." I said, "Oh, no, I'm determined to come back. I'm just going to do this year. I have friends here, I have an apartment, and I will come back." I did the first year at UC Davis and loved it, had a wonderful experience teaching, had a wonderful experience taking classes in the graduate program, flirted with my first exposure to feminist theory and wrote to him in the middle of my first year that I really wanted to extend my stay. I went back after the first year and met him and said, "I am just not done. They gave me another contract to be teaching for another year." He said, "Well..."

TS: Lost another one.

SHS: Yes, during the second year I met my then-husband, and I decided to stay and switch career tracks and embark on the Ph.D. in German studies at the University of California.

TS: I was thinking when you were talking about being in Vermont after being in Nashville, so you've been in the South, you've been in the North, you've been in the West; did it seem like the same country in all those places?

SHS: No. I mean, there were some similarities, obviously, but it was good for me to experience the diversity of this country. After Vermont I traveled for about thirteen weeks criss-crossing the United States and seeing a good bit of the West and the

Midwest, but I really was hungry to live in different parts with all the stays and enjoyed every one of them for what they had to offer.

TS: It may be obvious, but what could sunny California have to offer to explain why twenty-five out of twenty-seven students would leave northern Germany.

SHS: That was one of it.

TS: The weather?

SHS: The weather was definitely something, but UC Davis is also an interesting place in and of itself. It's the bicycle capital of the world, as they said at the time. It was founded as the agricultural university in the University of California system, but really was the alternative university, too. They had co-ops and communal dorms.

TS: Was Angela Davis there at that time?

SHS: I think she was at Berkeley, but UC Davis was the central valley campus and satellite university of Berkeley. Really a neat college town, but I think just like I had experienced initially my day-to-day living in America, the academic system in the States is very similar to the big lawns of a suburb.... to the extent that the university system in Germany, at least at the time, was very rigid, very hierarchical, very hands off in terms of mentoring or professor-student interaction and engagement....and the U.S. system is very different. I remember getting my topic for the master's thesis in an appointment that I had made with a professor whom I hardly ever saw. He had this very wilted looking envelope and scraps of paper in there, and from the envelope he drew the topics that he thought were of interest to me, but he didn't really know me. By the third time he had pulled out a sheet of paper and told me a topic that I should be writing on, and I said, "Oh, this is not really what I'm interested in," you felt the pressure that you should make up your mind pretty soon. Then you got your topic, and he would tell you, "I will see you six months from now with a two-hundred page thesis." That was the mentoring that you had. It was very, very difficult for somebody who had only written maybe seminar papers before. Even when you were writing papers before in the classes, or when you were going through the educational system, it was an experience to me at least where your papers were marked up, you were told what was wrong, there was not the encouragement of what was right or what was good thinking, so I experienced the high school and colleges that I attended in America as very different to the extent that teachers or professors were mentors. They were not gods on pedestals; they were willing to help you along, and they were applauding your efforts; they were encouraging you to pursue, whereas in Germany everybody was reluctant. "Well, you have this idea, but did you think about this, did you think about that? You might want to look into this before we take this any further."

TS: So you wrote about dime novels because you didn't have very many choices.

SHS: No, it was the third topic that came up, and I thought, yeah, you better grab it. But I was also interested in the dime novels because it was an interdisciplinary topic. I researched the German dime novels that talked about American women in the nineteenth century, and it was appealing to me.

TS: Oh, so you were moving toward feminist theory, and you just didn't know it.

SHS: I was moving. I didn't know it at the time, and I think I was more interested in combining the German culture with the American culture, the experience of Germans engaging with Americans. I had certainly met a few wonderful American women, so I wanted to know more about that because I wanted to become one, so I think in many ways it was an appealing topic.

TS: Were American women different from German women?

SHS: Oh, yes.

TS: In what ways?

SHS: Well, in my studies I tried to come up with a typology. I read about 120 different dime novels. Not all of them were good, but it became clear that there were about ten different categories. They ranged from the noble savage to the very calculating, aggressive business woman, and everything in between. I remember distinctly one novel in which an American woman falls in love with an aristocrat from Germany. He is very conservative and kind of backwards and not very adventuresome, and when the woman challenges him, he says, "You just make it sound like we are rabbits sitting in a cage, and you guys are off to discover the world and maybe even conquer the moon." This was in the nineteenth century, so I already knew that that was true.

TS: Were most of those dime novels written by women or by men?

SHS: Most of them were written by men.

TS: There were a lot of women writers in the nineteenth century.

SHS: Yes. Absolutely.

TS: But not writing dime novels maybe.

SHS: Some had pen names that were male, and they were actually women, but I think most of the ones that I researched were male, and only twenty-four found their entrance into my MA thesis.

TS: So you got your master's and did you use the term father professor?

SHS: Doctor Father.

TS: Doctor Father? So that's the way they were referred to, as a father, even though they really weren't, it sounds like.

SHS: No. But they were certainly patriarchal.

TS: Unless you've got this idea of the father in the distance that everybody obeys.

SHS: Absolutely. Yes. And strict and severe.

TS: Not an American father?

SHS: No, no, no. Although I had a good experience, and I shouldn't short-change that either. Compared to many of the students, I had a very good relationship with professors, but also because these professors were American Studies professors, so they had been at least in some ways impacted by the American educational system.

TS: Sure.

SHS: Whenever I could, I took American instructors in the German university because they were just so much more fun. They had interactive teaching styles, and the German system was much more based on lecturing.

TS: And we think of the whole concept of graduate research coming out of Germany, and the scholarship of the nineteenth century and so on. Well, you're at Davis. Why are you at the English department teaching instead of the Foreign Languages department?

SHS: Because I was an American Studies major, and I had written my MA thesis in English. My Doctor Father urged me to take a year to really refine my English, so I could do scholarship in English and write a doctoral thesis in English.

TS: So what better way than to teach English?

SHS: That's right. And it became a fabulous experience for me, a lot of work.

TS: You probably knew the rules of English a lot better than those that were native English speakers.

SHS: Absolutely. I certainly did. I think I was a good editor, but I think in some ways I also became aware, especially when I completed the second year and had to make a decision whether to go back or not, that you would always have a harder stance as a non-native speaker trying to get a position in the English department. I had a colleague from Mainz University who had continued also at UC Davis and had become a lecturer there. He was rehired. But I also had occasionally a disgruntled student who would say, "How come you criticize my English; you're not even a native speaker." I took that, but it resonated with me because certainly some of the specific terms or the jargon or the idiomatic

expressions, I was not comfortable with yet or familiar with. So when I decided to stay in the United States to get married and to not go back to complete my Ph.D. with my Doctor Father in Germany, I decided that I would switch careers and pursue a doctoral degree in German Studies because that would allow me to be a native speaker in the language and teach in my native language and not have that reproach that I wasn't a native speaker. And the irony was that I had taught maybe for about a year when a disgruntled student sat in class and said, "How come you think you can teach me German; you're a native speaker!" So it was interesting. I just laughed and said, "Yes, but I know where you're coming from because I'm also a learner of a foreign language." Since then I have decided that I would stay still in German and teach German.

TS: What did you do your dissertation on?

SHS: The theme with the women continued. My dissertation was on sexual violence against women in German culture. It was interesting because, as you know, when you do your graduate work you have to read the canon literature in the field and you have to write about it. In my case I was always interested in romance, dime novels, romance novels, but the classic texts that we were told to read in Germany, oftentimes celebrated as romance and as ravishment something that, to me, seemed pretty abusive. They were celebrated as classic love stories. At the time the feminist movement began to re-read literature from a woman's perspective, and I think I was intrigued that we had the liberty of doing so in the American system. My exams focused on some of the texts in which I tried to argue that the love story was really not a story of love and romance but of violence and violating the woman and abusing her. It became an interdisciplinary dissertation that took different slices from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries of specific works and showed how texts that had been dealt with as romance and love stories could also be read in a different way. To me it was interesting since I was allowed to work interdisciplinarily as I took dramatic texts and prose and film but also integrated legal texts and statistics into the dissertation research. I think that would have not been possible in a more traditional academic environment that I would have found in Germany or maybe even in another university in America. But UC Davis and the German program there and the female doctor mother I had at the time . . .

TS: Who was that?

SHS: This was Dr. Anna Kuhn. She provided a very different experience for me in the sense that whereas my doctor father had handed me this topic out of the yellowed envelope, she discussed with me the process of building a dissertation. We had peer review sessions where we, as a peer group, would read each other's chapters. She would give feedback throughout. We would go to conferences and talk about some of the chapters. It was a very, very wonderful experience that she facilitated.

TS: Fantastic. Were the novels that you were using written by men?

SHS: Well, yes, the texts were all written by men. The films that I discussed toward the end were done by women.

TS: So the women hadn't had much consciousness raising either when they produced these films?

SHS: Actually, it was a different tenor because the films were post-war films that were made by women....

TS: Post which war?

SHS: Post World War II. It was basically the end of the eighteenth century, end of the nineteenth century, and end of the twentieth century that I took samples to discuss the culture and the context in which these texts emerged. So the women's texts were very different and very radical, but equally controversial at the time for how they depicted the experience of women.

TS: Okay, so you finish in 1996 and by '97 you're at Kennesaw. Did you come straight from your doctorate to Kennesaw?

SHS: Yes, because my husband at the time, Garrett Smith, got the appointment at Kennesaw as an assistant professor. We had already pretty much determined that I would follow his path because he . . .

TS: Even though you were doing this feminist theory that's what you did.

SHS: Indeed, because I had a small child at the time, eight months of age, and I felt that he probably, even in this country, would likely make more money than I if he were to be employed. I wanted to be a good mother to my child, and I thought that if we were to go to Kennesaw my chances of getting a job teaching German would actually be probably bigger or better than staying at the West Coast where a lot of German programs have been cut and the orientation toward the Pacific Rim and away from Europe definitely was reflected in academia as well. Our move to Kennesaw was definitely something that I supported. It brought me closer to Europe and my family at the time as well, and my friends.

TS: Now had Garrett just finished his doctorate at that time?

SHS: Yes.

TS: And he was at UC Davis also?

SHS: He was, yes. That's where we met, and we finished pretty much within half a year of each other's dissertation programs, and he went on the job market, and for a geographer it was not easy to get a job.

TS: Harder for him than for you?



SHS: Harder for him to some extent because Cultural Geography at the time in California was not in really high demand, and academic hiring, especially in Geography, which was a white, male dominated field, had woken up to become more diverse in terms of hiring process. So we had to expand the radius of our search, and eventually when Kennesaw accepted we were very excited to get employed.

TS: I guess so. So where is Kennesaw?

SHS: That's right.

TS: But you had been to Atlanta.

SHS: I had been to Atlanta many years ago. We came to Kennesaw, which was of course in 1996 very different, but already recognizable as a growing and happening place.

TS: Well, 1996 is the year that we got university status.

SHS: Exactly. And I still have a t-shirt that says "KSC" ... because it was on sale and it was cheaper to buy, but it had just gotten university status. It had been a pretty place already then, the proximity to Atlanta, the cost of living very significantly cheaper than in California, the neighborhood in which we saw ourselves moving and raising a family very appealing, so yes.

TS: Okay. So you came here as an assistant professor in 1997?

SHS: I actually came as a wife of an assistant professor. I did not have a job, and I thought I was going to go crazy after staying for three months just as a homemaker and mom with a little infant. Then Elaine McAllister offered me, within the first couple of months, a part-time position in the Department of Foreign Languages teaching German.

TS: So you were an adjunct, and Elaine McAllister was the department chair at that time.

SHS: That's right. I started in January of '97 with an adjunct position just teaching one or two classes, and loved it. I loved being back at the university, being in the classroom, and then received a one-year temporary position in 1998, and then in 1999 the tenure track position opened up. It was a very difficult decision whether or not I should apply because I had just gotten pregnant with my second child, my daughter. I told Elaine, "I'm going to be a mom of two; I don't think I can be a tenure-track professor." She said, "I'm sorry, but I hope you can teach for us as an adjunct professor in the future." I went home, and I cried for about a week until my husband said, "Why don't you just apply, and if you don't get the job then at least you know you tried and it was not meant to be." So I called up Elaine and I said, "I think I've changed my mind. I do want to apply." I applied, and I was offered the job, and I accepted and have certainly not regretted it.

TS: It had to be tough though with two small children at that time.

SHS: Yes, but it was something where we found a provider, an in-home nanny who has now become our adopted grandmother. You just work through it and make it happen. I think we both appreciated at the time Kennesaw for being a place that was different from Research I universities... where most of our colleagues understood that yes, you have a job, you have a career, you work hard, but you also have a life, you have a right to have a family, and you have a right to have children. We tried our best to juggle the responsibilities and to take turns parenting our children, and both chairs in our departments always tried to accommodate our needs, and we made it work.

TS: I guess those two children are just about teenagers now.

SHS: Just about. My daughter is eleven and my son is almost fourteen.

TS: How was the job advertised? Was it a specialty in German or just a position to be a professor of German?

SHS: It was an assistant professor of German; that's how it was advertised; somebody who would be able to teach all levels and have the interest and ability to build the program and to recruit students for enrollment.

TS: Did we have anybody that was full time in German at that time?

SHS: We had one colleague who was not a real Germanist; he was a linguist; and he had been a full time professor on an annually renewable basis, I believe.

TS: I see, not tenured track.

SHS: Torry [Torpong J.] Goodson was his name. He decided after I'd been there for a year that he needed to return to Thailand to be with his family. As the eldest family son he needed to go back. That certainly opened up the new discussion whether or not one would maintain his position or try to expand it into a tenure track position. Together we had succeeded in significantly increasing the enrollment, and Elaine saw the potential in really growing the program and was able to get approval for a tenure-track position.

TS: So you're the first tenured track position in German. How big was the department at that time?

SHS: We had I think six faculty members.

TS: Six. So you had a few people, in French.

SHS: Spanish was the largest even then and French, and we had a dual appointment for Spanish and Italian and actually a dual appointment for Spanish and French.

TS: We had Lynn [M.] Fedeli, I guess. She was teaching Italian and....

SHS: And Spanish. June [K.] Laval was teaching French and Spanish. Elaine was teaching French and Spanish.

TS: And Rosa Bobia I guess was . . .

SHS: Was French.

TS: Had Judy [M.] Holzman left the department by then?

SHS: No, she was still there. She was doing Spanish at the time.

TS: Okay, so that's pretty much your department I guess.

SHS: Yes. Lucia Ribeiro, I believe at the time too, was doing Spanish and was director of the language lab.

TS: Okay, so a small department, but you get a chance to develop German studies, I guess, at Kennesaw.

SHS: Yes.

TS: That had to be exciting.

SHS: It was terribly exciting, yes.

TS: I think for a lot of people at Kennesaw over the years the fact that we've been a young university has allowed us to build things from the ground floor.

SHS: And this was very different in comparison to California, too, because of budget crises that seemed to always play themselves out in the educational system, too. They were cutting back left and right. There was always concern. But coming to Kennesaw we had the feeling, not just in my department, but also in Garrett's department, that this was a growing university where new ideas were welcomed, where there was support for that. Again, I was in the experience as if I was carried with a wave rather than having to swim against the stream—very wonderful and gratifying.

TS: Let's see, in 1997, we're still on the quarter system when you got here.

SHS: Yes. That's right.

TS: When was it, late 1990s that we switched to the semesters?

SHS: Yes.

TS: So you had to go through that process at that time, and there's a lot of program development that was associated with that.

- SHS: That's when we developed the German Studies minor. I was full-time tenure-track in 1999, and that's when we put the minor in place, the German Studies minor, which was the first significant change.
- TS: How many students were studying German at Kennesaw at that time? Who would minor in German?
- SHS: Oh, we didn't track them at the time—in the beginning maybe two or three. I don't even know. But it was mostly a service program to the BA degrees that required that you had four semesters of German, but already then, I had an eye towards benefiting from the opportunities in the community. For a German Studies student in the Atlanta area, there's lots of opportunity for internships, job opportunities, and, of course, travel to German-speaking countries as well.
- TS: What kind of internships in the Atlanta area?
- SHS: Well, there are lots of German companies, and typically they require language skills that are beyond a German minor, but we have also schools and non-profit organizations that are glad when they could get help. Early on, we established internships with schools where students would assist German teachers with the delivery in the high school or middle school, or we would tap into the German-American church, for example, where they would help and do community service, but with Germans and with using the German language. Then we had the German Cultural Center where we placed students, and now that we have the German Studies major, we can really look into placing students who are far superior with their language skills and then place them also with companies.
- TS: How many students would be in a German 1001?
- SHS: Back then we had reasonably full classes of maybe fifteen or twenty. I think the first semester when I came in, and we can verify that, there were maybe seventy students in the German program, and now we have 180 every semester, I would say.
- TS: When did we get the bachelor's in German?
- SHS: The bachelor's was approved last year, and it's really only possible because we restructured the department and now have the umbrella degree of a BA in Modern Language and Culture, and in it you can have a track of Spanish, French, or German, which was a move that we initiated I think maybe in 2001, where we restructured our different degree programs of French, French Ed., Spanish, Spanish Ed., as discrete and different programs into one umbrella degree program, and then we could add those tracks.
- TS: How would you describe Kennesaw students of ten years ago, and have you seen any change in students in the last ten years?

- SHS: Absolutely. And I remember distinctly when we first came, I read what the typical student was like, and I remember reading that it was a female, twenty-seven year old returning homemaker and mother . . .
- TS: That sounds like something I may have written—one of those little histories of Kennesaw State.
- SHS: Yes, yes, so definitely more likely the non-traditional commuter student. I certainly have seen the change when I teach numbers in the beginning “Baby Deutsch” classes, and I ask how many of them are twenty-one or over twenty-one. There were lots more hands going up in the earlier days and hardly any now.
- TS: You call the 1001 “Baby Deutsch” class?
- SHS: Yes.
- TS: Okay, that’s good.
- SHS: I think that at the time when I started I had been warned against the “insurance kids,” the local kids who would live at home and come to Kennesaw only because they could stay on mom and dad’s insurance, and to value the non-traditional students who would come back for the second time to get their degree at Kennesaw, so I think there was a very wonderful difference from having come from a Research I institution in California or Middlebury. I loved the Kennesaw students because when you get them in German they are typically there for a personal reason.
- TS: Right, they’d probably take Spanish as the first choice of anybody that didn’t care or didn’t know much.
- SHS: And since then I have caught on to the idea that Kennesaw students are wonderful, and I think the best are as good as any students I have ever taught in any of the Research I universities. But then there are the other ones as well. I think in German Studies we get either the ones who are definitely committed and very excited about German for whatever reason, or we get the ones that are just not quite with it, and they have missed every other sign up time, and German is the only place where there is still a space that they can find!
- TS: Yes, I’ve seen a few of those kinds too. So ten years down the road nowadays we have residence halls and a lot more traditional-age students. Do you find them better prepared, better motivated, less motivated or less prepared? Any change at all in ten years? It’s not a long time.
- SHS: My colleagues may disagree with me, but I am very excited about the students that we have these days. I think the ones that are sitting in my classes are interested in foreign cultures; they want to learn about the world. I think 9/11 had a lot to do with this as well; the students that I talk to appreciate foreign cultures and want to experience and learn

more about them. They are at times better prepared because I do think we benefit from the trickle-down effect from the Research I universities... that Kennesaw has gotten students who have not gone to UGA, or Georgia State, or Georgia Tech. I enjoy the different challenges. Certainly, technology has been a challenge in my ten years of being here because it's a continual relearning and new learning process, and students are used to the fact that you use Power Point and grade books and electronic devices continuously. I enjoy the challenge. I enjoy that when I don't know, they are readily willing to help me out in trying a different route to get to something and not missing class time as I try to figure out because they have been there. On the other hand, we've also experimented, especially most recently, with online platforms and found that some students are very much resistant to moving further into that direction. They want to have the traditional interpersonal relation and interactive classroom delivery.

TS: I would think that it would be very difficult to do an online German course, wouldn't it?

SHS: Yes, and we have done a hybrid format, but nowadays these textbooks allow the students to do online additional exercises both in listening and in speaking, and even in chatting simultaneously or in synchronization. I could even, from my home office, access their audio files and comment on them. It's wonderful what technology has done.

TS: So you don't have to go to a lab and listen to a tape.

SHS: No, that's so "twentieth century"! [laughter]

TS: Right. That's the way it was in my day.

SHS: That's right, and that's how it was in my day. But that's no longer how it's done. What we've found is that some students are definitely more tech savvy, but they may not have as many skills or as diverse a skill set as we sometimes assume. Nor do they sometimes want to expend the energy that it really takes to become familiar with a more complicated platform. I think to us, who are the older generation, the digital immigrant rather than the native, I'm at peace that it will take me quite a while in order to understand something, but it's definitely a challenge.

TS: I just have to ask the students in the classroom, what do I need to be clicking on? [laughter] Well, you received the Distinguished Teaching Award this year. Why don't you talk a little bit about your philosophy of teaching and maybe what you do in the classroom that is different or unique or whatever.

SHS: I don't think I do anything that is different or unique or even special. I think I've certainly benefited from the teaching and learning that I have received in the different cultures in which I have gone to school or taught, but very significantly I think I've been influenced by the role models who I have copied or tried to imitate. Specifically, also here at Kennesaw, I've benefited from the opportunities that CETL has provided through book clubs, workshops, web sites, grants, and opportunities for collaboration, where I have explored through the interactions with other instructors and, of course, through my

research and scholarship as well, ways in which we can recruit and retain students in the German classroom.

I think the charge that I had been given early on, to recruit and retain students in German Studies, was the biggest motivator to make myself into the best educator and instructor that I could be because I felt that only if I have students who like to be in the class will I be able to recruit and retain them. If they understand that German is doable, that German is fun, and that German is useful and validating for them, then I can hope to build a program. So I've pursued early on in the classroom an interactive, student-centered teaching style where they are encouraged by what they already know to continue to explore ways in which they can grow their abilities. And to accept that when students come into the classroom, they have different, diverse learning styles and learning abilities. So in writing syllabi and in teaching in the classroom, we have put into place a diverse set of assessments in all our classes. So your grade doesn't hinge on just the test or just the homework or just the role playing. It's pretty equally split between different abilities and categories that allow every student to pick and supplement the strengths (or weaknesses) that they may have. That, I think, is something I had not experienced before in my own learning, and I really learned through reading and studying here at Kennesaw.

The discipline, in my case, has undergone lots of changes, and certainly we've benefited from that, but I think one of the significant ways in which German has to work a little harder is to explain to the students why studying German language and culture is of benefit to you. So to make it transparent how they can gain from that study has been a challenge and an opportunity because, let's face it, the classic student who wants to read Goethe in the original, that's not our typical KSU student. They want to know: "What can I do with this?" When they sit in the Spanish class, the instructor has no difficulty in convincing them that when you go down the street, you will be able to use your Spanish. So we have had to work a little on researching and verifying the concrete and tangible benefits that students can get from studying German language and culture. Hence, our efforts from the first semester on are designed to provide opportunities in which students can take their learning outside the classroom in order to assess how beneficial it is in the real-life encounter that imitates being in the authentic culture. So we've tried to put them together with native speakers who are either guest students or visiting students or degree students here at Kennesaw, or we allow from the first semester on student service-learning opportunities where they reinforce the academic learning through community involvement by going into after-school programs in an elementary school and teaching third, fourth, and fifth graders about basic German language and culture. I think that's probably the most significant way in which I've tried to change how traditional classroom delivery was for me.

TS: So you're talking about even in the 1001 through 2002 they might be doing these service learning projects?

SHS: Yes, a lot of them are doing it, and we have . . .

TS: What better way to learn a language than to teach it?

SHS: It seems like a no-brainer, but it is pretty novel as a concept, but I think it's gaining increasingly more recognition. The beauty of it is that we are doing it in a context where there's lip service to the importance of foreign languages, but actually, more and more programs are cut, especially in the early grades in public schools. On the other hand, there is evidence of much more than lip service at Kennesaw given to experiential learning that benefits students. The scholarship reinforces this, so I was able, for my own career track, to combine teaching with service and scholarship in a way that I found beautiful and very gratifying.

TS: Right. A lot of your scholarship has been scholarship of teaching and learning, hasn't it?

SHS: Yes, by necessity, because for ten years I was the only one in German. When you try to build a program and especially in teaching within a German Studies minor, you can't really teach a seminar on sexual violence against women. I've never taught a class in my dissertation area. You have to be a generalist, and you have to try, I think, "to kill two birds with one stone" in marrying your teaching with your service or your teaching with your scholarship because otherwise you can be run ragged.

TS: Are you going to do anything with the new American Studies masters program here?

SHS: I've been loosely involved with it, but at this point I think I have set my sights on publishing right now and trying to build and recruit for the German Studies major. Further down the road I'd love that.

TS: You've also taught a course called World Languages and Cultures. Why don't you talk about that a little bit?

SHS: This was a course that was conceptualized when we reorganized our degree program in our department. At the time, which was just at the heels of 9/11, we felt that somebody who graduates from a department of foreign languages with a degree in "Modern Language and Culture" needs to know, beyond their disciplinary focus on one language and culture, more about the rest of the world. Traditionally, students with a major in French, or Spanish, or German come from French, or German, or Spanish departments, and they will never learn about Arabic, or Chinese, or Hindi, and we felt that in this day and age, it benefits our students to get at least a survey class where they are introduced to the development and spread of languages and cultures over space and time, manifestations thereof in our society and culture, and their personal prospects in the world that are enriched by knowledge and proficiency in language and culture.

TS: Sounds like a good course.

SHS: I think this is now the twelfth semester that I'm teaching it. I became sort of the default faculty. I developed the course and refined it and began to do some scholarship around it, too. It's a fascinating course, but it was a steep learning curve at the beginning because I was traditionally trained and didn't have the knowledge either at the beginning. So I



definitely felt like an imposter at first, but knew that, thankfully, I would possibly know a little more than my students and learn every semester that I would teach it. I draw on the international students in our classroom to help me supplement the knowledge that I've gained from books and other sources.

TS: Great. What kind of scholarship or writing are you planning on doing in the future?

SHS: After having been on my own for ten years, I have now another colleague who is a tenure-track faculty member. We have a total of seven faculty teaching in the German Studies program. The two of us are full-time, tenure-track in German, but the other ones are shared positions or adjunct faculty. It all goes to show that I have a little bit more time to put my attention to research and scholarship. I have a lot of things in the pipeline, and they are very diverse. My chair tells me that it's too much, but I couldn't say no to any opportunity that presented itself, when I felt that I had, for the first time, the time to do it. The most recent published results were probably the little articles that I wrote on a German author who will come to campus this fall and who will be the first big guest and visitor in a lecture series that I organize for schools and institutions here in Georgia. It was a publication on her and her work, a contemporary German author . . .

TS: What's her name?

SHS: Angela Kreuz.

TS: Okay. Talk a little bit more about that.

SHS: This was a smaller publication. I should have actually mentioned that my most recent peer reviewed publication was a collaborative publication on the study abroad. That's really more important than my work on Angela Kreuz, but she's on my mind because she's going to come to campus. But the peer reviewed publication was done with Catherine Lewis and Hugh Hunt and born out of our Maymester study abroad that was an interdisciplinary, thematically focused program that we run now in our fifth year. It originated as a program entitled "Following in Anne Frank's Footsteps" where we combined the disciplinary perspectives of obviously history, German Studies, and philosophy to travel with students from Germany to the Netherlands in retracing Anne's life from birth to death in the concentration camp. Because it was a very novel approach to study abroad, being a short term, thematically focused and pretty heavily interdisciplinary theme, we were fortunate to get a scholarly article published on what all that entailed and the planning and the results that we've seen. So again, scholarship of teaching there, scholarship of teaching also in the author whose short story I used in a classroom and then wrote an article about her, scholarship of teaching to some extent in the most recent and almost finished project that I have developed again interdisciplinarily with co-editors Sarah Robbins and Federica Santini, a book called *Bridging Cultures* in which we are collecting a hybrid range of essays by women faculty of foreign descent who speak about their acculturation process in academia as a growing and increasingly more visible (and vocal) minority group who discuss their experiences both as

challenges, opportunities, and a “mixed bag.” That collection is almost a finished manuscript, and we’re pitching it to various publishers right now.

TS: Any big conclusions that you’ve found?

SHS: Yes. I think a very intriguing process, very different from any writing that we’ve done before because it’s non-discipline specific. It’s very personal in parts because we tell our stories, but buttress it with scholarly research. The findings are such that many of us come to the table as faculty in the American university system out of our own volition. We want to be here, but we feel that we have to work harder, either by our own expectations or by perceptions that because of our foreign status we might not be good enough—our English might not be good enough. We struggle with both our cultural heritage of coming from sometimes a very elitist university system to be in a system that is maybe more customer service oriented, less hierarchical. The diverse faculty comment on this in different ways. In addition to the foreign status that we have, there’s also the women’s status that we have. I think that we have acknowledged this in our contributions as well... that we have been impacted by the gender issue in various degrees and various disciplines. It’s exciting because we have contributors from around the world and from a range of disciplines. But the process is a long and arduous one. When you try to get so many people together; especially, when you do a project that is really novel and only an emerging direction in scholarship right now, but more and more publications have come out. It’s beginning to be accepted as real scholarship when you write about your own experience as a narrative that bears weight and is of importance. So that’s exciting.

TS: Yes, I guess so.

SHS: And then another book project is under way, it’s with Catherine Lewis, a documentary history of the Third Reich, through our collaboration in study abroad and a grant that she received, in which she enlisted me to help contribute primary texts that would be put together in a way that hasn’t been done in a long time and in a format that could be used by high school teachers and undergraduate instructors.

TS: Are you doing the translations?

SHS: Sometimes I’m doing the translations. We do the selection together and the didactization, writing discussion questions and introductions that would help make it user friendly.

TS: Has all your scholarly writing been in English? Have you done anything in German, I guess I should ask?

SHS: The article on the German author I published in a German magazine, and that was done in German, but for the most part I have done my scholarly writing in English.

- TS: It's interesting that you were talking about the problems with non-native speakers who are teaching in America. When you write something in German, among German scholars, how are you perceived?
- SHS: I think many of my German scholar peers are in the same position... that they, too, publish in English. If you get published in English, then you're really good.
- TS: I guess what I was wondering, I'm not sure that I can articulate the question very well, but do scholars in Germany see you as an American or as a German?
- SHS: I'm not that well connected with the scholars in Germany because German Studies in Germany is somewhat different from German Studies in America. There is increasingly more cross over and cross fertilization, but I have limited understanding of foreign language pedagogy in either country. I want to say, before I get into that, that my dissertation was published in Germany and used at a German university, even though it was written in English. I had a German editor who thought that it was very good, but the fact that it was used at a German university spoke to the fact that it was useful to them. In the field of language pedagogy there are various directions. German scholars in Germany are looking at new ways in which we can benefit students including via shifting the focus from competency in a specific language to intercultural competency and by teaching them skills that are not so much hinging on a specific target language, but skills that could be applicable in multiple contexts and multiple languages. This is a new direction that I'm also pursuing in a research project that is shared by some of the German scholars in Germany.
- TS: Well, I've got at least two more big questions to ask you. First of all, we've asked everybody who has received the Distinguished Award to define a master teacher. How would you define a master teacher, what is a master teacher?
- SHS: Gosh, that's a difficult question, and I should have thought about this before I came in.
- TS: That's a Bill Hill question.
- SHS: That is, yes. Well, I think what immediately comes to mind is somebody who has a sense of their own place in the teaching context with an openness to continue to learn about new delivery formats. I think I've been inspired by Parker Palmer [author of *The Courage to Teach* and other books; speaker on several occasions on the KSU campus] to the extent that he was the first one to encourage me to think less that I need to be everything to everybody, but to also trust that I can be my own person in the classroom while being open to expanding who that person is. But getting back to the definition of the master teacher, I think it's somebody who trusts that, through trial and error, they have explored already many ways (and not just trial and error but also research and scholarship and dedication, of course, and hard work) that they have found some ways that work, and yet they are willing to tweak and refine and continually update how they're doing things. At the same time, I think a master teacher is also a mentor and a guide both to students and to peers, and I guess when I hear master teacher I want to

resist the hierarchy here because I think a master teacher doesn't need the title or the label or the pedestal, but rather is keenly aware that there is confidence and wisdom and whatever you want to call it, but is able to share that in a non-hierarchical way.

TS: You're in a department that has a number of adjuncts that teach introductory language courses. Have you had any opportunity to mentor adjuncts?

SHS: Yes. From the very beginning we've had adjunct faculty; and, of course, now we have junior faculty. When I came, I think we had six or nine people and now we have twenty-six. It's grown fairly rapidly, but certainly I'm now one of the senior professors in the department, and it has been very gratifying to be a mentor to the junior professors and to work in a team. In some ways it was easier when I was the only one because it was just between me and my alter ego to make decisions, and if I didn't do it, nobody did it, whereas now we need to have a collaborative approach as a team. I don't know how my colleagues perceive me, but I have learned a lot through my experience in the system and working with colleagues. I enjoy the team approach that is very non-hierarchical and collaborative and listens before decisions are made, so every semester we have meetings where we invite adjunct faculty and junior faculty to suggest changes, and when changes are made or suggested, I usually have an opinion, but I am so far—hopefully this will continue—willing to listen to especially the new and recently trained folks to educate me about how things could be done differently and better.

TS: That's great. I know in history we're really struggling with so many adjuncts that we've thrown to the wolves in the past. Just now Gerrit Voogt is going to be the coordinator for adjuncts in our department this year to try to make sure that they feel like they're part of the department.

SHS: Really? I must say, about a year ago, we had a wonderful CETL book club about that very topic. I'm certainly not in the situation that an English adjunct coordinator or history adjunct coordinator is in, but it is a very important job to try to get the buy-in from adjuncts to facilitate their work, and I think we are only beginning to recognize the importance of that.

TS: Right. It must have been when you were new here that Betty Siegel brought Parker Palmer to campus for a Convocation program. Were you here then?

SHS: I was not here.

TS: You weren't here at that time? Did you actually get to meet Parker Palmer?

SHS: No, I just read his books. But I've been benefiting from the discussions about the [Ernest L.] Boyer model [former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; author of *Scholarship Reconsidered* among other books] and I guess [John N.] Gardner [president of the Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education; coauthor of *The Freshman Year Experience* and numerous other works; speaker on several occasions on the KSU campus]. The approach that Kennesaw, in my

understanding, has taken (which is shifting a little bit now, I think, as we put more emphasis toward scholarship but that is still preserved in the learning-centered university that Dan Papp promotes) is that we really pay attention to what we do in our teaching and service, obviously, and in scholarship.

TS: Well, you've had a relatively short career at Kennesaw even though you're a senior faculty member now in foreign language.

SHS: Twelve years.

TS: Twelve years, that's right, a long enough time to ask you whether you've seen Kennesaw change in this twelve year time. You mentioned scholarship just a second ago. How have you seen Kennesaw change maybe is a good way to ask it?

SHS: Well, when I came in 1996, I believe we had twelve thousand students, and we had just gotten the university title in the shift from college to university. I've seen it grow as an institution where when I first came I heard the label, "It's a high school without lockers for students," and "It's a university that has trouble to retain faculty," because of the culture that engulfed you to the extent that you were so overcharged with teaching and service that you didn't have time to do scholarship. If you enjoyed teaching and service, you stayed, but if you had ambition, you got out in order to go to an institution that allowed you to do scholarship. My position was such from the beginning that I enjoyed teaching and service. I didn't have any choice, either, because in building the German program that was where I had to put myself into it.

TS: You had to do teaching and service.

SHS: At the time I taught up to five, sometimes six classes in a semester.

TS: In a semester?

SHS: In a semester, because I took on an overload because we wanted to offer a variety of courses. Some of the classes were internship supervisions... but the teaching load has been reduced. The focus toward scholarship has shifted, and I think for the better. The faculty that we are hiring is, I think, stellar. Increasingly, the students choose to come to Kennesaw, and it's not a "B" choice any more. I think in our growing department I've seen energy and innovation. I am a little concerned that we're losing the collegial ambience that I really valued, and I think it behooves us to maintain our efforts to keep it as that.

TS: Is the decline in collegiality within the department or that you do not have the contact across the campus that you once had?

SHS: I wouldn't say that it is a declining collegiality. It's just that we are becoming, in my department, a lot bigger so that we don't even know any more what people are doing because we're all doing so much, and we have very little time to exchange about that. So

we're trying to put into place through collaboration, through teaching visits, through more exchange more transparency as to what we're doing because I think there's opportunity in benefiting from each other's efforts and knowledge and activities, so that we don't each reinvent the wheel independently, but rather coordinate and make it more effective that way. I think there's great support on the university's part for that through CETL's teams and faculty learning communities, which I have benefited from, but even in my own department I have collaborated with colleagues in French and in Foreign Language Education to just remain at the pulse of things with my colleagues in a collegial way and in a constructive and purpose-driven way. But I think there's a danger as Kennesaw grows and as we become more focused on scholarship that we remain in our own offices doing our own thing.

TS: Right. Well, what has kept you at Kennesaw?

SHS: Well, for a long time I was definitely consumed with teaching and service, and my scholarship was put on the back burner, and I gravitated towards teaching and service because it met the needs of the program, the students, and the institution, and scholarship at the time was defined as also being accepting of presentations at professional conferences, so I limited myself to that. So in that regard, I wasn't exactly a high prize for other institutions to woo me into or recruit me for another position.

TS: The Research I's you're not going to go to.

SHS: No. But I really liked at Kennesaw the ambience of support, of constructive encouragement, and of support for whatever I wanted to set my mind to. If I wanted to pursue it, I could do that. That was something that has been envied by many of my colleagues at other institutions. There is, for my lifestyle, a very good balance of diverse activities, occupations, and a healthy dose of independence that I value and wouldn't want to miss. I feel that at Kennesaw, there is no ceiling. I could see myself here in twenty years and still explore new and exciting opportunities for the benefit of my students or for the institution.

TS: Fantastic. Well, I think I'm about out of questions. What should we have talked about that we haven't?

SHS: I think I'd like to maybe add a couple of sentences about the teaching award itself. When I looked at the website and saw the long list of award recipients since 1982, I'm certainly honored to be there. I want to reiterate that I don't think I would be a recipient had I not been receiving a lot of help and assistance and inspiration from many, many faculty colleagues and agencies on campus. But I also couldn't help but notice that I'm the second international faculty in that long line.

TS: That would be about twenty-eight now, so two out of twenty-eight, not a lot is it?

SHS: No it's not. And I'm the first international woman faculty member as well. In reviewing this, the first international faculty member was Vassilis Economopoulos, and he certainly

was a mentor to me in many very indirect ways, but I had forgotten that the award on the college level was really in his name.

TS: In the college of Humanities and Social Sciences.

SHS: Yes. And he was one of the early contacts when we first came to campus, who I met and respected so very much. I think he was reflective of the generous spirit of faculty at Kennesaw that intrigued me from the beginning and probably held me here too. But I remember distinctly that when he told me the story of how he lost his eye and a leg—and I may not get the details right—because he stepped on a land mine left by the German *Wehrmacht* in Greece.... that I found.... that here's this man who's talking to me, and he comes toward me without any grudge, or resentment, but openness of heart and mind... to a colleague to whom he extended help and assistance. I saw him various times sitting on a bench early in the morning with his cane, and he would stab little acorns with his cane. I would say to him, "Vassilis, what are you doing?" He said, "Oh, I make it easier for the little squirrels to get the acorn." He was an inspiration because I think that's what he practiced in his teaching and in his mentoring of faculty and colleagues, of young novice faculty like my ex-husband and myself, that he was a generous spirit and a great teacher and mentor who was an inspiration from the very beginning, so I feel very honored that I'm together in that line of faculty.

TS: Right. Well, unfortunately I wasn't able to interview Vassilis, and so we interviewed Marj, and even Marj wasn't aware of all of the good work that he was doing in support of students and even financial support for students until after he died. Well, that's a good way to end the interview, I think.

SHS: Okay.

TS: Thank you very much.

SHS: You're very welcome.

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