

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH DEDE YOW

CONDUCTED AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

EDITED BY DEDE YOW

for the

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KSU Oral History Series, No. 95  
Interview with Dede Yow  
Conducted and indexed by Thomas A. Scott  
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Thursday, 13 November 2008  
Location: CETL House, Kennesaw State University

TS: This is Thursday, November 13, 2008. We're in the CETL [Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning] House. I'm Tom Scott. This is the KSU Oral History Series and today I'm interviewing Dede Yow. Dede, let's just begin by your talking a little bit about where you grew up and went to school and things like that.

DY: I was born in St. Joseph's Hospital here in Atlanta and went to grammar school in Atlanta in DeKalb County. Then my family moved to Albany, Georgia, and I was in the third grade. What I remember about that distinctly was the fact that I was put in a lower reading group in the third grade because Dougherty County Schools were far superior to DeKalb County Schools. The programs they had for students were just astounding. Every Wednesday we would get on a bus and we'd go to the Y and swim. I was amazed as a child to see this.

TS: This would be the 1950s that you're talking about that they were way ahead?

DY: Let me think, I was born in '49, I was in the third grade . . .

TS: Late '50s. Third grade, '57 or somewhere.

DY: Yes. I lived there for seven years.

TS: So late '50s, early '60s.

DY: Late '50s, early '60s, and as a matter of fact, I was living in Albany when the King movement happened.

TS: Which would have been '62.

DY: It was 1962. I don't remember anything. I have no experience to connect with that except just a real feeling of unease. We had a maid, a domestic worker. Here we were, I would say, very middle class, you know, bordering on lower middle class but middle class, and as we know in the city of Atlanta, there were even black people who had maids so that was certainly no class distinction.

TS: In the '30s, when they built Techwood Homes, some of the people in there had domestics.

DY: Yes, in fact, that's what I was referring to; I remember our talking about that in class. But I remember that Janey was frightened.

TS: Janey?

DY: Janey was our domestic help and she took to bringing her son over with her and she must have been afraid for him.

TS: To leave him alone?

DY: I don't know. I just remember playing with him the back yard, me and my little brother, which is very interesting in that my mother is from Mississippi, and she was one of the most enlightened people about race, so that was fine with her. I'm sure Mother understood why Janey was bringing her son with her. But that was my recollection of that time and it makes me sad that I wasn't any more aware than I was. I just remember we couldn't go downtown to the picture show.

TS: Because they were boycotting?

DY: They were boycotting and it was dangerous. Really, until I started studying the Civil Rights Movement, and we began teaching our class [Georgia Writers/Georgia History], I always thought that that was a failed movement; that the Albany movement was a failed movement, and my views were changed on that when I went to that wonderful museum in Memphis.

TS: The Civil Rights Museum?

DY: The National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis and saw that the Albany Movement isn't cast as a failure at all, but as a wonderful tribute to the community of social justice advocates that had begun to develop.

TS: I think the difference is that people looked at it from a national perspective and said, well, King didn't accomplish what he wanted and he moved on to Birmingham, but then people continued, the activists in the community, as I understand it, continued to negotiate with the city and hold their protests and actually accomplished a great deal after King was gone from the scene.

DY: Once those networks are in place, I was reading an article yesterday about this, the same things happened with the Obama campaign and the network that's been in place, and then I have a friend who's a community organizer, and these community organizers are saying we've got this structure, we've got to figure out what good we can do with it. Apparently that's exactly what happened in Albany.

TS: At least as far as you're concerned; did you all even talk about it in school?

DY: Oh no.

TS: So it's like it didn't exist?

DY: It did not exist. Only white children were in my school. Except that I remember one boy who was Mexican, and I remember him because my best girlfriend, they exchanged friendship rings, which was very interesting. But her mother was from the North.

TS: The Mexicans of course, went to the white school.

DY: The Mexicans went to the white school.

TS: I guess they had correct skin color at least.

DY: I'll tell you something else that's haunted me for a long time; that girlfriend whose mother was from the North, from Michigan, she had come down to work in the program for blind students, she taught blind students in the public school system. Her father, this girlfriend's father, was from somewhere in south Georgia but I'm not sure where. I remember her showing me his Klan robe in the closet and she said, "He puts this on sometimes and goes out." I didn't know. But how horrifying in retrospect. And did the mother know that?

TS: She had to.

DY: Of course, she had to. This Northern woman who was idealistic developing programs for the blind in Dougherty County, Georgia, while her husband's out burning crosses and lynching people or whatever. It's so interesting to think about the kinds of parallel lives that we lived as southerners of that time. And how they intersected domestically.

TS: Why did you move to Albany?

DY: Daddy's job.

TS: Let's put their name in for the record.

DY: Okay. Wendell Putman. The rest of the family spelled the name "nam," as is commonly spelled, Putnam County, but he changed it for some reason and I never understood why he did it. I knew that his older sister was always mad at him for changing the spelling of his name.

TS: So he changed it from Putnam to Putman.

DY: Yes. My mother's name is Ruth Carbonette and she is from Mississippi and the Carbonettes—there were a bunch of Carbonettes in southern Mississippi, very near New Orleans—about fifty miles outside New Orleans was where they lived. Italians and French and very mixed.

TS: What is Carbonette?

DY: It's French. My grandfather was French but my grandmother was British. I never knew my great-grandmother but my mother remembered her British accent and remembered that she was such a prim, prissy little lady. My grandparents were farming people. Now, Papa worked on the railroad too, but they had a farm and raised chickens and cows and that kind of thing, and so I grew up going down to Mississippi every summer which is the most wonderful thing that happened in my childhood, to have that experience. And then going to town was going to New Orleans, so imagine that! New Orleans was just another world and I think, that really had a great effect on how my mother and her people viewed the world because they really weren't isolated.

TS: More cosmopolitan through New Orleans.

DY: Yes, that's not to say that they were not racist people; but no, I never heard any of the kind of ugliness or ugly speech that I know went on during that time period.

TS: I just know growing up in east Tennessee and going every summer to visit relatives over in west Tennessee, it just seemed like a different world and very uncomfortable in some ways because in east Tennessee we weren't obsessed with race and west Tennessee it seems like that's the only thing they had on their minds.

DY: In Mississippi there was still great, great segregation. I just remember the contact that my grandmother had with black people—you know, how you'd go and buy eggs or buy something from somebody and it was always very cordial. There are as many different experiences of growing up in the South as there are people, so that's why all these years of teaching Southern Literature and Southern Culture, to think there's a hegemony, there's not.

TS: What did your father do for a living?

DY: He was a salesman. He was very much a Willy Loman type from *Death of a Salesman*. Very energetic, very personable.

TS: Did he get transferred down here?

DY: He moved for a better job. Then he came back to—he worked at, they called it Frozen Foods then, he was a manager, a district manager, and then came back to Atlanta to work in the company that he had worked for before we moved to Albany. We came back to Atlanta and moved to Tucker, and I went to Tucker High School.

Back in Albany what I learned to do to entertain myself was read, and I read all the time. I remember, we had the Carnegie Library in Albany and every summer you could go and sign up for whatever program they had. One of them, you got just a piece of construction paper that was a map of the United States and you would get a stamp for a state for every book you read. I'd fill up four or five of those every summer of just going and getting

books and reading. My mother imparted that to me and my grandmother read too; they all read books.

TS: Do you have any insight into why Albany schools were so much better?

DY: I have no idea and it could have just been my experience and the class that I was in. I went through middle school in Dougherty County too. It seemed to me that the teachers were better and the teachers were more invested in the students. There was always some kind of field trip somewhere to learn about something.

TS: So you graduated from high school about '67?

DY: I did.

TS: Had they started to integrate at that time?

DY: No.

TS: Still all white at Tucker High school.

DY: I do not remember any black students in my school at that point; there may have been black students but Tucker was growing at that point and I might not have seen those black students but I don't think there were any. Then I did what we call, I guess a JET experience today, and went and took some courses at DeKalb Junior College and really enjoyed that, and then went to Agnes Scott. I had to start in the fall; they wouldn't let you start in the middle of the year at all so that's why I went to DeKalb Junior College.

TS: You went there after you graduated from high school or while you were doing the JET program?

DY: While I was doing the JET program.

TS: So come September of '67 you go to Agnes Scott.

DY: No, I stayed at DeKalb for two or three more quarters before I went to Agnes Scott so I must have had another year.

TS: So September of '68 then.

DY: September of '68 and then I graduated from Agnes Scott in 1970.

TS: So you were there two years.

DY: That's right. It was an interesting time.

TS: Right. But you're still getting out one year early that way.

DY: I was. They didn't call it that at all. Oh, I went and took a couple of courses to finish my high school curriculum at what DeKalb County called adult education school and I had the best teachers there I think I ever had in high school. That school was established for girls who got pregnant, so it was pregnant girls and then the boys were the ones, I guess, that caused trouble. They'd have their Marlboro's rolled up in their shirtsleeves.

TS: The alternative school.

DY: That's exactly what it was. It was so interesting. Classes were interesting, people were interesting, and the teachers were great. I took an economics course there and it seems like I took a literature course there so maybe it was courses that weren't offered at Tucker High. It was a very interesting environment. I've always found people that were sort of outsiders more interesting than the mainstream types and there they were. Some of those people went to DeKalb Junior College too so there's a purpose served by those schools.

TS: Georgia Perimeter College today.

DY: Georgia Perimeter. I've run into people that teach there.

TS: They've got about as many students as we do.

DY: I didn't realize that.

TS: On all their campuses put together.

DY: I know back when I first started here at Kennesaw, there were people in my department who were active in the Georgia-South Carolina College English Association. I would go to those meetings and present papers, and people from DeKalb were there doing very interesting, innovative things. It was very much a teaching conference, and so that's how I knew, well, there're still very good teachers at DeKalb; there always were. As a matter of fact, you know who taught there? Bob Barrier.

TS: Is that right?

DY: Yes. And when he said at my retirement party the other day that Dede and I go so far back, that's where we knew each other.

TS: Did you take one of his classes then?

DY: No, I did not. He was the advisor for the yearbook and the newspaper, and I worked on those. And then we ran into each other at graduate school. He was already in the Ph.D. program at Georgia when I came in. It's very interesting that our careers go so far back.

TS: How did you get to Agnes Scott?

DY: I had a very lovely history teacher, Malcolm Lockhart, at DeKalb, and both of his daughters had gone to Agnes Scott. He singled me out early on and said, “I want you to go to Agnes Scott. You will enjoy that very much.” That’s really how I got there. I had another mentor there that was very influential, Robert England, who taught a course that was sort of like great books in history and literature. He was an architectural historian and every summer he would go to Europe to do research on the domes and ceilings of Gothic cathedrals. When he would return we would have weekly meetings for him to show me all his slides and tell me about what he had learned and what he had experienced. Yes, he was a very important mentor in my life. It’s interesting that there are historians—in fact, well, my undergraduate degree from Agnes Scott is in history, but it’s very much intellectual history. My favorite professor there, Geraldine Meroney, taught medieval history with Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as one of the texts. I did end up with a double major because I took lit courses.

TS: What was the culture like at Agnes Scott back in those days?

DY: Oh, repressed.

TS: Really?

DY: I remember a young woman getting expelled for coming in drunk. But intellectually it was a good place for me, I guess. There were a few women there that were what I would consider sort of not mainstream but not many. They were smart women.

TS: No campus activism in that era?

DY: We had a candlelight vigil.

TS: An anti-war one?

DY: Right. Meanwhile, my radical boyfriend, you know, was hopping on the Greyhounds to go to all these places to march. I hate I missed that; I really regret that I did.

TS: You didn’t go on any of those marches?

DY: No, my mother would have been so upset. I did not want to displease her. Now, I understand she would have been fearful for my safety. But yes, I was very traditional and going on to graduate school and getting my degrees. Then the first job I interviewed for was Kennesaw and that was David Jones; he had come to Athens, and I went for an interview. By that time I had married John in 1978, and I finished my dissertation in 1980, worked for a year for Developmental Studies, and got out of there. It didn’t save me getting subpoenaed for the Jan Kemp trial.

TS: We need to talk about that a little bit. Let’s talk about graduate school first though. How did you decide that you were going to switch from history to English?



DY: Hm. I told—especially my women students whom I mentor about careers—I did it for possibly the most stupid reason a person can do anything. My boyfriend was an English major. At that time—he had gone to Chapel Hill.

TS: The one that was doing all the protesting?

DY: The one that was doing all the protesting, yes. When I came to Georgia I just thought, well, this will be fun. I always enjoyed reading those books in English courses.

TS: Why did you go to Georgia? Because it was close to home?

DY: Because it was close to home, that was primarily the reason that I went there. I had no idea what I wanted to do. I thought I wanted to teach but I saw myself teaching in high school. I didn't see myself teaching on a college or university level. I took a couple of education courses after I got to Georgia and didn't think that that was what I wanted to do. I was just going to take my chances.

TS: Did you have any mentors at Georgia?

DY: Oh, I had a wonderful mentor, Edward Krickel. He was an American Lit. specialist; I say he was my mentor; he was not my dissertation director. My dissertation director was George Marshall from Americus, Georgia, whom I understand did wonderful things during the desegregation of the University of Georgia and was very, very helpful in that process and took into his home black students. He's a Victorian literature specialist.

TS: Took into his home meaning inviting them to dinner?

DY: Yes. Socially to make them feel comfortable. As we know from reading the document in your book [*Cornerstones of Georgia History*], Hamilton Holmes said he would go for days without anybody speaking to him, so I always appreciated that Dr. Marshall extended his hand to the desegregating students. But Ed Krickel was what we now call an Americanist, and I took everything that Ed taught. He was a Vanderbilt Ph.D.

TS: The Agrarians?

DY: The Agrarians. Yes, he was there at the time that they were there, that Andrew Lytle and Allen Tate were there. He was very influential in my thinking.

TS: Did he adhere to that philosophy of the Agrarians?

DY: He adhered to the ideological aspects of Agrarianism that saw nature and the land and the reverence for the land as crucial to survival of culture. He in no way adhered to the racism; he in no way adhered to that. I think that was what attracted me very much to his classes was that fundamental appreciation for the land and the rootedness of people in the land.

TS: Right. Did you enroll immediately into the Ph.D. program when you went there?

DY: I did.

TS: Okay. So you get through and did John get through before you or after you?

DY: I wrote my dissertation first and then he wrote his dissertation because we had a room—we rented a little house in Watkinsville—and we had a room kind of off the back porch that we set up our typewriters in and took turns writing out there. John had a year at the Institute of Higher Education, and that year I was teaching in Developmental Studies. Yes, I think his degree is '81. John knew—we both TA'd of course—and John knew he didn't want to teach. When I came to Kennesaw, just a few years after I had gotten here, Karen Thomson was the interim chair of the English department, and Bill Bergeron took a year's leave of absence to do programming for Peach Radio

TS: I remember Bill very well.

DY: Yes. I saw Bill when he and his family came to Atlanta when Katrina hit; he has since gone back to New Orleans. The area that they lived in was not damaged. But John Yow took the full time position in Bill's absence and I think that sort of let him know finally that he did not want to teach.

TS: Right. You got your doctorate in '79 or '80?

DY: I got my doctorate in '80.

TS: Then John in '81. Then he comes to Kennesaw in '81?

DY: Well, we got married in '78 and then moved here, moved to Marietta.

TS: What year did he fill in for Bill Bergeron?

DY: Let me think. When was Karen interim chair? If I came in '82 it was the next year that the structural changes occurred when we were no longer . . .

TS: Yes, she would have been the interim chair of the Humanities division back then, I guess, wouldn't she?

DY: No, Beggs was the chair. Greider was chair of Humanities division.

TS: That's '83 before that happens, I think.

DY: Okay. Then we became, what came after the Humanities division? Were we colleges?

TS: Yes, then we had the College of Arts and Behavioral Sciences.

DY: Of which Beggs was the dean.

TS: So there would have been an English department at that time.

DY: George Beggs was the dean and that happened in '83?

TS: I'm pretty sure.

DY: Then for a year John Greider was the chair and then left that position, and I don't remember why.

TS: I can't recall.

DY: Or was removed from the position or whatever and we had an interim chair and that was Karen Thomson.

TS: That would be '85 by that time.

DY: Yes.

TS: So it's that late that John had his year of teaching?

DY: Yes, he'd been freelancing; he did freelance writing.

TS: But you're already three years by then.

DY: Yes, I was already here three years and John was doing freelance writing. In fact, that's all John's ever done, really.

TS: Let's go back and talk about the Jan Kemp situation. You graduate in '80, you immediately started teaching at UGA in Developmental Studies, Developmental English, and it's about that time that there's a big blowup that involves the athletic department and Jan Kemp and mistreatment of student athletes.

DY: Actually, I had a full time tenure track position, and I began to teach in the fall of '80; I stayed only a year. I saw that coming, it hadn't happened yet but I saw it coming. I was very aware of what was going on.

TS: And you think about Developmental Studies, and we had a huge Developmental Studies program at Kennesaw but we were open admission as a junior college, but UGA had admission standards so I guess there weren't very many reasons, there wasn't much of a reason to have Developmental Studies other than for athletics, was there?

DY: Athletics and children of alumni who maybe couldn't get in through the front door. Yes, it was very much a place of special privilege. It was very interesting, now that I think about it; you had these many, many black students who were athletes, black males, and a

few—we did have Hershel Walker’s sister who came for one year because they recruited Hershel through getting her—she was a runner—but yes, there were the black male athletes and then there were primarily white female, middle and upper middle class students.

TS: Who were the daughters of alumni?

DY: Correct. The faculty that taught there were wonderful people for the most part. Good teachers. I enjoyed all of them. Jan herself was a fabulous teacher. It was really basic skills, and I’m so glad I did it because I really learned grammar and punctuation. I never learned it officially, even in a couple of linguistics courses, but when you teach something you have to learn it. But I knew I needed to get out of there. I could see a big storm brewing because Jan was butting heads with Leroy Ervin and I liked Leroy as a person, he’s a very personable man. One of the reasons Leroy was brought in was because they were using the *Georgia Review*—they were taking editorial positions away from certain people on the faculty—and it was being used for political leverage and Leroy was brought in to head the *Georgia Review*, which was absolutely revolting to people that I knew in the English department, for example, who had worked on the *Review*. Leroy was there to serve as he was needed. He and Virginia Trotter were the ones that were named in the suit.

TS: She was a vice president of something or other, wasn’t she?

DY: Academic Affairs.

TS: Academic Affairs. She was probably the first woman in that job, wasn’t she?

DY: She might have been. Her degree was in home economics, and I think that was the college she was affiliated with.

TS: So Leroy becomes the coordinator or whatever . . .

DY: The way the thing was set up, they had coordinators for English, reading and math, three components, so Jan was the English coordinator but Leroy was what I guess we would call the head of the center or something like that, the head of Developmental Studies. I left Developmental Studies and very fortunately got the job here at Kennesaw and we moved here to Marietta.

TS: That’s ’82?

DY: That’s ’82.

TS: So ’80-’81 you’re doing Developmental Studies. Then what happened in ’81-’82?

DY: What did I do ’81-’82? Oh, I left out a year. I must have gone to Developmental Studies in ’81 because I had an instructorship in the English department, you know, one of those

post doc appointments. I totally forgot that. That kind of just blends with all those years of teaching as a TA.

TS: Right. Okay, so you're an instructor for a year but it was just a one-year appointment and then you go to Developmental Studies and you're in a tenure track position.

DY: Yes, and I stayed there one year.

TS: And you could have stayed a long time but one year was enough.

DY: I guess I could, but yes.

TS: Then everything blows up about that time or right after you left. What was the blow up about, just remind me. She got fired or something.

DY: No, she was demoted if I remember. She may have—did Jan get fired? Yes, she did get fired, that's right, they fired her.

TS: She's really protesting the exploitation of athletes?

DY: Yes. The exploitation of athletes, the fact that they were in that program in Developmental Studies, actually to give them another year of eligibility, that's all it was for. Jan worked so hard with those athletes; she would go at night to the dorms and tutor them. She would stay until midnight; she worked and worked and worked. Many of them would pass the classes because they did the work, but if they didn't the grade would be changed or somebody would call Leroy.

TS: So they would change the grades?

DY: Yes.

TS: So you might have signed an "F" or an "unsatisfactory"—I guess you had "satisfactory/unsatisfactory".

DY: Yes.

TS: Then Leroy or Virginia Trotter changed it to "satisfactory"?

DY: Yes.

TS: They were staying eligible because the grade was satisfactory but Jan was concerned that they weren't developing any skills that were going to help them if they didn't go to the NFL.

DY: That's right. That was exactly Jan's point. Jan and Leroy were getting along just fine as long as Leroy didn't interfere with the academic aspects but once he did—and the reason I'm hazy about what led up to Jan's firing was because I was gone.

TS: But you had to go back and testify. What did they ask you about in your testimony?

DY: They asked me about Jan's stability and what kind of person she was and what kind of person she was to work with.

TS: So you were a character witness in her behalf?

DY: Yes. Right.

TS: You were called by . . .

DY: I was called by Jan's team.

TS: I guess she was the plaintiff in that case and so you were called by the plaintiff.

DY: Right. It was a very odd experience.

TS: Did she do a deposition or were you actually part of the trial itself?

DY: I was part of the trial; I had hoped and prayed I would not get subpoenaed; didn't think I was going to be and just, you know, had a knock on the front door.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A  
START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

TS: You were saying that you had lived in Lawson's house [John's father, Lawson Yow].

DY: On Paper Mill. Then we moved out here to Kennesaw. There was a knock on the door one afternoon and there was the subpoena. I didn't have to wait long to testify; you know, we were sequestered. I do remember seeing Leroy and his whole legal team and all of them in a room there and he just waved and hollered, "Hey, how you doing?" Even though I was there to testify against him. I was glad to see the outcome. The irony, of course, of all of it, to me, was the fact that it was the president of the university that lost his job and not the athletic director but that's the way those things go.

TS: That president was . . . ?

DY: It was Fred Davison.

TS: Who was from Marietta.

DY: Yes, and whose mother lived next door to Madeline Miles over there in Marietta. He was a veterinarian, remember; he came out of vet school.

TS: He was very close to Jennie Tate Anderson and the Anderson family.

DY: I'm not surprised at that.

TS: I don't know how they related but they were close, I know that. So at any rate, how long did you have to testify? Were you on the stand for ten minutes or an hour?

DY: It felt like days. I really don't know, Tom. Probably ten or fifteen minutes.

TS: That's not too bad then, I guess.

DY: Well, it's really an out of body experience, or was for me, and the jury was so bored; they were so tired. Judge Horace Ward let anybody who wanted to say anything come up there and say it. He sure did.

TS: I guess that did bore the jury.

DY: People's heads were just falling off their bodies.

TS: Okay, you get through that but you're already at Kennesaw by this time so just talk a little bit about how you got to Kennesaw. Did you see an ad in the paper and apply for it?

DY: No, I saw that they were going to be interviewing for positions for schools, colleges around Atlanta and Kennesaw was interesting to me just because it was Marietta, I guess. That's when I met David Jones. We had a real good time.

TS: So David Jones had gone over there to a career day?

DY: That's exactly right.

TS: We used to do that in the old days. Not we, the administrators used to do that.

DY: We had a chat and I applied for the job and a few weeks later my dissertation director told me that he'd gotten a call from John Greider who asked him if I was going to be the kind of employee who would cause trouble, and Dr. Marshall said, "Well, she will speak her mind but I don't think she'll cause you any trouble." John Greider said, "Well, I've got a bunch of women here causing me trouble."

TS: I've got a pretty good idea who the women were who were causing him trouble.

DY: I think we both do. What an interesting question—this is 1981 and somebody's asking this question about that; is this woman going to cause trouble?

- TS: Were there any women in the English department at UGA while you were there?
- DY: Two that I remember. Well, Nan Carpenter was in Comparative Literature and they were housed with the English department, but Rosemary Franklin was a nineteenth century Americanist and Blue Calhoun was turn of the century British, Pre-Raphaelite. Another, Betty Jean Craige was in Comparative Lit.
- TS: None of them on your committee?
- DY: I had one woman on my committee, Betty Irwin in Linguistics. My favorite Linguistics professor, Julia Stanley, was a radical feminist lesbian. I had her for a course called Transformational Grammar, and we studied Noam Chomsky and that's how I got introduced to Chomsky. Julia was very, very smart. She came out of the University of Texas, Austin, linguistics program, one of the top programs in the country, and that was an eye-opening course. Julia's mother had a bookstore in Athens. But no, there were very few women, which was interesting to me because there were women at Agnes Scott who were very powerful women. That was a sort of a shift. That was a pretty radical shift in many ways to go from Agnes Scott to Georgia.
- TS: Of course, Agnes Scott is a women's college.
- DY: A Presbyterian women's college and the president looked like a Presbyterian minister, not unlike my current Presbyterian minister. I think they're all kind of cut from the same cloth.
- TS: Well, there's supposed to be a relationship between Columbia Theological Seminary and lots of men from the seminary dating women from Agnes Scott from what I've understood.
- DY: Yes. We had a wonderful teacher for Bible—we had a required year for Bible at Agnes Scott—and he was adjunct from Columbia, named Charles Cousar. That was just fascinating to have a class with him. You know, you do Old Testament in the fall and New Testament in the spring. By the time you get to the New Testament you're so glad!
- TS: You've had enough.
- DY: Well, and also, when you think about the test over the Old Testament, there's so much that you have to . . .
- TS: Right. The New Testament is shorter.
- DY: Yes, it's shorter and you have sort of a key player, a key heroic figure through there that you can keep up with.
- TS: Okay, so you get to Kennesaw and you have all these radical women like Cary Turner . . .



DY: Whom I teamed up with immediately and she was so good to take me under her wing and get me on panels, to go to conferences and present papers, yes, that was a good thing.

TS: Cary, I'm trying to remember when she was finishing up her doctorate at Georgia State but it's probably late '70s, early '80s before she got through, wasn't it?

DY: That's right. And when I came to Kennesaw there were people who were completing doctorates and working on doctorates. I know Martha Bargo was completing hers at Georgia State, wrote her dissertation on Milton; Virginia Hinton had her doctorate, if I'm not mistaken.

TS: Yes, she had it before she came here, and journalism, I believe, was her field.

DY: That's correct.

TS: Nancy King would have been finishing up at Georgia State.

DY: Nancy King was finishing up; Dot Graham was finishing up.

TS: Dot has hers from Georgia State?

DY: Dot has hers from Georgia State. Dot has her master's from the University of Georgia because we knew each other there; that's where we first met was back in graduate school many years ago. But yes, I came into this department and it was so interesting that people were so intellectually engaged. Well, I had to teach Composition for a whole year with nothing else; John Greider would not give me a World Lit. course until I had taught Composition for a year. I'd been teaching Composition, you know, for nine years now, so that World Lit. course was just the most wonderful thing. David Jones gave me all his notes and people shared their notes.

TS: It was already called World Lit.?

DY: It was called World Lit. I guess so.

TS: At one time it was Western Lit.

DY: You're correct, it was Western Lit. It was Western even though it was called World Lit. It seems like there were two sections of it; there was 201 that everyone had to take, English 201.

TS: Yes. Maybe it was already World Lit. by that time.

DY: I think it was World Lit. because I remember we had—among many, many contentious department meetings in terms of curriculum—the issue of whether it should be solely Western World Lit. or whether it should be World Lit. Bob Hill was the chair at that time

and as chair he broke the tie vote for it to be World Literature. It's interesting when I think back about that. I guess that's a good thing about these oral histories is they make you pull things together, and I realize maybe that's where divides started: the people who wanted the course to remain Western World Lit. were on one side and the people who thought that the World Lit. course should include literature in addition to the West were on another side. From the very beginning in that department I became active in curriculum. Maybe it was watching my mentors at Georgia that inspired me because Georgia had a very highly politicized English department, and I don't even know what you would call Developmental Studies, the Gulag or something. But I knew the place to effect change was in the curriculum, and of course, it was such a perfect time to come, since the department was developing new courses. I have a wonderful memory of me and Don Russ sitting at my kitchen table here in Kennesaw, having come from a long marathon curriculum committee meeting and writing up these course descriptions for the catalog of new courses. Then in '94 when Sarah Robbins and I were working on that NEH grant, we were aware, I mean of course we were already aware, but it just became so obvious that the courses in the English department were so very narrow and male-focused. I feel like I've spent a great deal of my career expanding, attempting to expand curriculum and that takes time and it can be difficult to get people to shift paradigm.

TS: So you basically had two issues simultaneously: one is to get new courses in that are more world-focused, or to make the courses world-focused, and then within the courses themselves to change the canon to include more diversity.

DY: Correct. So I feel like I got in on the ground floor of that and it's just wonderful to me, just so perfect, that we now have a master's degree in American Studies to begin fall, 2009. I couldn't be more excited!

TS: As of this week.

DY: As of this week. So coming to Kennesaw I've taught, of course, composition—you know, Linda Noble and I have joked before about those of us who came in at the beginning taught everything. I came in in Brit. Lit. and I taught Chaucer and I taught nineteenth century British literature, twentieth century British literature. Barbara Stevenson is the medievalist and very early on, when I came to Kennesaw, she said, "Let's go out to lunch and decide whether we want to teach Chaucer in Middle English or in translation." I thought, this is so great! But I sort of evolved into American Literature and into Southern Literature, what I always read kind of on the side, on my own. And John Yow did his dissertation on Andrew Lytle, one of the Agrarians and John was always a Southern literature person and always reading what I thought were these great books. He was reading so much contemporary literature that looked like so much fun. That's how I started developing those courses, to tell you the truth, it was fun reading.

TS: By the time you got here Betty Siegel was president.

DY: She was. In fact, I came in her second year, right? She came in '81. I hate that I missed all the festivities, and I know from some of our oral histories, like with Helen Ridley what a really amazing and wonderful year that must have been to have all those . . .

TS: The View of the Future?

DY: Yes, the View of the Future. What a good thing. And I've always appreciated about Kennesaw that there are a core of people who have been sitting down and deliberating where they are and where they want to go. I wanted to see where this institution was going. I knew I didn't want to go teach anywhere else; I had very fertile ground for curricular development, for governance and all that, so I served for several years on writing up the vision statement and the mission statement, and that committee work got me out in the university, working, for example, with people from the business school. I worked for years with Teresa Joyce. So curriculum is connected to the vision of the institution.

TS: Did you have some knock-down, drag-out battles over the mission statements?

DY: No, that was primarily wordsmithing that gets so tedious, but no, there was a good deal of agreement on those statements. I think the higher administration has always had a pretty good idea of where they wanted this institution to go. But I don't think they've listened to faculty nearly as much as they should have.

TS: Maybe a way to ask this is what did you see the mission of Kennesaw as being when you got here in the '80s?

DY: To serve the area. To serve this area, to serve this population.

TS: So it was always community-focused?

DY: Yes. I think in some ways that hasn't really changed. Our community has expanded greatly because we've expanded; the whole metro area has expanded. Kennesaw is still teaching the teachers, developing the nursing program, exactly what Dan Papp said he wanted to come in and expand on with a good, solid liberal arts core.

TS: That's where the demand is, is areas like nursing, health sciences.

DY: But in terms of liberal arts and certainly in terms of our disciplines and inter-disciplinarity too, Kennesaw has fabulous programs here. I was talking to my friend, Wende Marshall, at UVa who has a student who's looking for a graduate program, and I said, "We just got a master's degree in American Studies and there are good people here." I've always been proud of being at Kennesaw. It annoyed me that people somehow still, well, until about ten years ago, thought Kennesaw was still a junior college. You and I know what Betty Siegel did; we know how she spread the word and did the great PR for this institution.

TS: I think that was her number one contribution in those early days.

DY: I do too. She did it beautifully and she did it well. Now Dan Papp has come in to take us to where we need to go now.

TS: Yes. We were kind of a well-kept secret in lots of ways.

DY: Yes. But I've always enjoyed my students at Kennesaw and certainly my colleagues.

TS: Well, you went over to the vice president's office and then the president's office on internships in the '80s.

DY: View from the top!

TS: How did that come about? Let's see, I guess, '85 you were an intern in the office of the Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs.

DY: That was Arthur Dunning. I'm trying to think how that worked out. I think it came about by editing that newsletter, the *International Focus* newsletter and because Art Dunning is the kind of person that is such a teacher at heart. He saw that I was new and coming out of the University of Georgia. It was a real mentoring experience for me to see how the university worked and to see it from the area of academic affairs. In that year, when I was interning with Art, I was also selected for the Leadership Kennesaw and Betty and I connected and had such a good time together during those many sessions.

TS: That must have been the first year for that?

DY: It was the first year of Leadership Kennesaw. It was fascinating, it was wonderful. What a great thing for a new person to see. Chamber of Commerce, going down to see how everything worked and having speakers in; it was just a real education about the area.

TS: I'm sorry they abandoned that program.

DY: I'm sorry they did too. Well, it morphed into something else; it became Leadership Cobb because I know Deborah Wallace was participating in that.

TS: Well, some people do that and I guess CETL [Center for the Excellence in Teaching and Learning] does some programs that are comparable for new faculty now.

DY: That's an interesting observation, Tom; I wonder if new faculty is as interested in the history of the area.

TS: It could be different now.

DY: Right. They seem to be very focused on their areas, their disciplines, publication, and research, that sort of thing.

TS: Yes, could be. So one year you worked for Art Dunning and then the next year you worked for Betty Siegel.

DY: Well, it was so much fun because I shadowed her. It was exhausting! It was so exhausting! I had a toddler, I had Ruthie—what year was this? This was '86.

TS: So '86-'87 for Betty Siegel's office.

DY: In '86-'87, so Ruthie was three, she was born in July of '83. But John worked at home, wrote at home, the child in her crib, hearing typewriter keys from her earliest moments on this earth. No wonder she's morphed into a writer. But that year was exhausting.

TS: I guess so. Did you have to start at the Waffle House at 5:30 in the morning?

DY: Meetings, meetings, meetings. I don't remember going to the Waffle House, I just remember thinking, golly these people get up early to meet. Now, I got up early but I got up early to read for my courses and to grade papers but to get up early to meet . . . and oh, it just seemed interminable, some of those meetings, I just thought, I don't want to do this. I didn't find the ideas or the ideologies, if you want to call them that that were being discussed in these meetings, of really great interest to me. I found Betty, of course, fascinating; it was always a joy to watch her work. And it was fun to watch the interaction, but I knew that that was not going to be my game, that I didn't want to start my day getting up and going to meetings. When do you read? When do you write? When do you teach? When do you sit and talk to somebody about ideas?

TS: Were you doing any teaching while you were doing those internships?

DY: Yes, I was and I'm trying to think. I got one course release for those internships, so I must have been teaching what, Tom?

TS: Two classes back then.

DY: Three classes was a full load.

TS: Regular, a full load was 3 five-hour classes.

DY: Yes, so I was teaching two classes. Well, fortunately I had been here long enough to have some under my belt.

TS: Well, even the department chairs were in that same boat—they only had one course release, I think.

DY: Teaching faculty at this institution haven't had any relief really until Rich Vengroff came in here and switched, changed the load.

TS: To the 3 three-hour classes?

DY: Yes.

TS: Which is 3 three-hour classes as compared to 3 five-hour classes. It seems to me 3 three-hour classes are just as time consuming as 3 five-hour classes.

DY: They are.

TS: When we went to the semester system I think we really increased everybody's teaching load, when they went to 4 three-hour classes.

DY: We did. It was a lot harder.

TS: So we're back down to where we were for all practical purposes.

DY: But the spin it was given was we can be more productive. That's always been the amazing thing to me about Kennesaw, is that people seem to produce, be highly productive and do good, good work, with an amazingly heavy work load.

TS: Compared to the research institutions for sure.

DY: Oh, I know. When you talk to people who work and teach in those research institutions, I mean, look at the books you've written carrying a full load.

TS: So after two years you told Betty Siegel thanks but no thanks, don't want to be an administrator.

DY: I did.

TS: Did they offer you any position?

DY: Yes. Director of CETL. She wanted to start CETL; she wanted to get the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning going.

TS: You would have been a good one for CETL.

DY: Maybe so, I am now, I wasn't then. I was too young, I didn't know enough, I didn't have the knowledge or experience or wisdom. I had enough sense to know that I needed to develop myself professionally. I needed to publish some, even though publication is not what's long on my Vita. I have done a number of scholarly presentations, been involved and active in our professional organizations because I didn't feel like I would have any credibility if I didn't. I know how I feel about administrators who do not have academic credibility and scholarly credibility. Now Janis Epps, who interned in Betty's office with me, stayed for one year; Janice started CETL up, and then went to Atlanta Metropolitan. She may have gone some place before that, but I think she went to Atlanta

Metro as Vice President for Academic Affairs. I went back to teaching English and just sort of expanded from there. I guess we started teaching our course jointly, you said we've taught it ten times, but I think it's been thirteen years ago.

TS: Yes, I think it was '95 that we started.

DY: Nineteen ninety-five was when Sarah and I ran our NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] Summer Institute [Domesticating the Secondary Canon—putting women writers and activists in the secondary school curriculum], so that was a really important year for me. I had so much energy going and I finally felt grounded. I feel like I made a really good decision there—to stay in the classroom. I have a vivid memory of Pat Taylor: he and I, in fact, were going over to Betty Siegel's house for some party or something, riding over there together that afternoon, and I told him what she had offered me, and I said, "Pat, I just don't feel like I can do this," and he said, "Well, don't. Don't feel like you have to do it just because it was offered to you." I'll always be grateful to Pat for that; he said, "You're a teacher, you're a wonderful teacher, you love it, do it. Just because it looks like it's a step up, don't do it for that reason."

TS: It depends on how you define a step up, I suppose.

DY: Yes. And look at Pat; he was a wonderful department chair for years. Then when he retired from Kennesaw, he went to Piedmont College to run everything over there.

TS: Right. So you're teaching full time and developing new courses and serving on committees.

DY: Serving on tenure and promotion committees, yes, did a lot of that.

TS: And then, I know you were involved with the Carpet History project when we started that in the early '90s.

DY: That was fun.

TS: Of course, I can remember when we started teaching the course together simply from when the *Cornerstones [of Georgia History]* book came out, which was the fall of '95, and I think we taught it once before the book actually was published.

DY: Did we?

TS: I think so. I think we started out—we were quarter system then, it was either a winter or spring quarter.

DY: Oh, Tom, interesting. I don't remember that.

TS: Well, I had all the chapters that Kinko's ran off, and I'm pretty sure that we did that once before the book actually came out.

DY: It's hard to think of life before *Cornerstones*.

TS: Well, for that course, yes. So we're doing that and then Sarah Robbins was here by that time, and so why don't you talk about those Summer Institutes?

DY: Sarah and I did an NEH Summer Institute the summer of 1995 that was really a very, very intense experience.

TS: You had actually, according to your Vita, done a Kennesaw Summer Writer's Workshop even before then in '88.

DY: That's right, I did a couple of those, ran those, that was an administrative kind of thing and that's where I met Tony Grooms, as a matter of fact.

TS: How were they funded?

DY: By students paying fees to come. I think this was a Bob Hill production; Bob was so good at that, Bob has always been so good at appreciating living writers. I think Bob got some money, some administrative monies to pay the people to come, and the writers to come in.

TS: Right. So you did that for a while and then you all got an NEH grant in '95.

DY: That was a Summer Institute focusing on women's writings of the nineteenth century. We called it "Domesticating the Secondary Canon" and it was for English and history high school teachers and middle school teachers, and it was very, very interesting and fun. I've continued to work with Sarah on the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project throughout the years and been involved in that when I could with the exception of the past couple of years. One of the productions from working those years with the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project was that book that we edited about writing: *Teachers' Writing Groups: Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection for Professional Growth*. I have an essay in that book on mentoring which I enjoyed doing because I had always maintained that there's really no place for mentoring to be recognized institutionally in professional review. I know we have the categories in tenure and promotion portfolios, "Teaching, Mentoring and Supervision." But mentoring, as you know, takes a tremendous amount of time and the time commitment is only increased now that we've got students going to graduate school. When I think about the time commitment to writing these recommendation letters it's just really demanding . . .

TS: Yes, I've got three waiting for me to write right now.

DY: I've got two. [laughter]

TS: This week, somehow or other, I haven't gotten to them yet.



DY: Once you get going and get started it's so joyful, but oh, I just sort of dread it because I want to make sure I say the right thing.

TS: Sure. How much time do you spend on mentoring?

DY: How do you measure that? I end up with two or three students in every class that I have coming for advising or mentoring, however you want to call it, because while in our department Mike Tierce is the advisor, what he does is plot out courses for students, not really advise them about why they may want to take those courses or where those courses are going to lead. He doesn't ask: Are you going to graduate school? What are you going to do? That's something that takes conversation, in depth discussion, and thoughtfulness on the student's part. I would say I advise two or three students out of every class and spend at least eight hours a week. And that's not counting the time that you're writing letters, or now, students will send a draft of a statement of purpose when they're applying for graduate school, that takes time, you go in and edit that. But that's been the most fun thing I've done the past few years in advising and mentoring. I think, upon retiring, I don't know exactly what I'll be doing, but I think it will be taking this aspect of my work and doing that somewhere, somehow, counseling, mentoring.

TS: Well, you do a good deal of mentoring with young faculty too, don't you?

DY: Yes, I do, as a matter of fact. I developed that aspect of my work and honed it for my CETL appointment. This three- year CETL appointment is as Faculty Fellow for Diversity across the Curriculum. It's basically a professional development appointment, so I work with faculty from across the campus with a focus on diversity and social justice. That's where my commitment is, that's where my passion is—in social justice. And equity.

TS: How did that diversity fellow, fellowship, whatever the term would be, come about?

DY: Val Whittlesey was the first one to do the diversity fellowship. Bill Hill [Director of CETL] decides on the categories for the fellows. They have evolved over time, depending on what's needed. Val had been down here at CETL working for a year, and I came to a couple of her book groups, and I thought, "This is wonderful!" When Val moved into Academic Affairs, I saw the position had opened and was being advertised. I called Bill Hill and said, "I want to apply for this but I'm white." He said, "That doesn't matter at all." My focus in teaching has been primarily race and I guess human rights, you know. For example, I've done work with Teresa Joyce and with the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender] program as well as with other underrepresented groups in the university, those without a voice in the mainstream. It's been very rewarding: movies and brownbag lunches, dinner and a movie, book groups, and interactive workshops. It's different, but it's still teaching.

TS: How well attended have the book groups been?

DY: They're always maxed out at twenty. And I know the first year that I did this, I did the movie *Crash* and we had thirty-five people. We did dinner and I had a panel moderated by Linda Johnston with the graduate program in Conflict Management. On the panel were Harold Wingfield [Political Science] and Flora Devine [Office of Diversity], Linda Lyons [KSU Center for University Learning], Judy Brown Allen [Sociology]. We had a very interesting discussion. Racism is a volatile topic—it's a topic that people get upset about when they talk about it, and that movie just sort of tweaks everybody's little prejudice. Linda Johnston was very good. I'm glad I had a mediator. It was good to have a mediator. But I think everyone left feeling like they had said what they felt and that we had all experienced something that we might not have otherwise experienced if we had not come together and talked about it.

TS: So the purpose of the programs is educational?

DY: It is educational and also—well education of the individual, but also the idea of expanding one's own understanding about diversity and social justice, and I see it as totally connected to curriculum. What you learn you take back and integrate into what you teach, whether it's the text that you choose or how you teach your texts in your class. Our course [Georgia History and Georgia Writers] is a perfect example of that; I think we have a model course of diversity, multiple views, and multiple texts. But not everybody thinks about it that way, Tom, or thinks about their teaching in that way.

TS: So part of it is to raise people's consciousness?

DY: Yes.

TS: Although maybe some of those who most need their consciousness raised are not going to these workshops.

DY: That's always the case. Always the case.

TS: Yes, your true believers are the ones that come, sometimes.

DY: And sometimes they'll drag somebody with them or sometimes food gets people in. But I think too, when you're doing that kind of work, and it hasn't been—I would say the past eight years in this country have not been years that we all felt very comfortable with discussion about racism and social justice. It's almost like you had to be in hiding to—I'm not just talking about civil liberties but the sort of seething undercurrents—and I've sensed it in classes, the racism that exists, we weren't talking about it. Or if we talked about it, there was always the right side to be on and that was God's side. There's a certain group that had laid claim to God. [laughter] Now, I feel like there's going to be a change in this country in terms of how we talk about race. I don't see how there can't be. It'll be open now.

TS: Right. Well, you don't have to hide your Obama button any more.

DY: No I don't! [laughter] Although I do not have an Obama sticker on my car out in Paulding County and I'm not going to.

TS: That's probably wise.

DY: I think Paulding on the map though was very, very light purple, on that most recent map I saw. Well, let's hope we can get beyond that; let's hope that we don't have to—oh, if the day could come when we didn't have to worry about our stickers.

TS: Well, in one of these conservative discussion lists and I hadn't really been reading what people have said, but there's been a very active discussion about whether Obama's election is the end of African-American history as though our discussions of race are going to be irrelevant from now on. If you can get elected to the highest office in the land you can do anything.

DY: What a white supremacist view, when you think about it. That's going to be the end of African-American history because African-Americans have been defined only through positions that they could hold. Oh. It's just a new chapter; it's just like you and I have talked about before. It's post-Jeremiah Wright.

TS: Yes. The discussions will continue but maybe it'll be on a different plane than the discussions of the past or with a different set of possibilities than have existed before.

DY: And a different set of assumptions too. I think there are probably, Tom, many people who wouldn't have even guessed that a Black man, or a bi-racial man, could be like Barack Obama: intelligent, articulate.

TS: Yes. Well, I think we're all a product of our experiences and you've got to give Jeremiah Wright some slack because of the world that he grew up in and what he thought America was capable of. I think there's a lot of feel good feeling out there right now that by golly, we are capable of electing a Black president.

DY: And we are and we have to acknowledge that.

TS: I think the whole world seems to be taking note.

DY: I think what Jeremiah Wright was saying was what many, many black people knew to be the truth and what those of us who have not been in the black community or black churches but have been trying to do this kind of work, know has been the truth for a long time. His views were not odd or peculiar to me.

TS: Well, no, being in an academic community, you hear them all the time.

DY: I guess so.

TS: At any rate, it's going to be very interesting. I guess what a lot of people are hoping for is that we reach today—I think from the conservative side I don't think they're necessarily, the people in this discussion group are not racist, it's just a lot of them are hoping that we're to the place where we're beyond race in a sense that people will be judged—when Obama gets in he's going to be roundly criticized because of what he does in health care or what he does in this and that and the other and not on the basis of the color of his skin.

DY: I think that's so idealistic. I think frankly, Tom, people who have that view haven't really talked about race or confronted what they themselves think about race. Harold Wingfield, he used to do this, I don't know whether he still does or not, but Harold Wingfield said he would go into his classes and say, "I'm a racist; you're all racists." It's along the lines of "I'm a sinner; we're all sinners here, let's just get that on the table right now!"

TS: I think he says, racist, sexist, homophobic, I could go down a long litany of lists.

DY: I know exactly.

TS: About all these prejudices. So get beyond that. We're in an alcoholic anonymous group, we're all drunkards. Yes. Well, at any rate, you did that for a few years, and you've done a lot of professional service in the community; why don't you talk about that a little bit, what you've done?

DY: What have I done in the community, in professional service? In the college, in the out-there community? Oh, yes, those literary discussions, working with the Etowah Valley Historical Society, you know that's a while back; I have not been doing things like that lately, Tom, to tell you the truth. Since '96, it really has been a while. I think it's because I found a venue here at school to do it, that might have really been where I did it. I know that a couple of times I've given the Sigma Tau Delta, that's the English honor society, I've given their induction lecture.

TS: Why don't you talk some about your scholarship; I know you've done a lot; you've written on Mary Hood for instance and brought her to our class before.

DY: Yes, I like to say I write about my friends. I think about what Mary Hood said, "I would never, never review a book that I could not give a good review to. It's too hard to write. I would never do that to a writer." I think . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B  
START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

TS: You were talking about Mary Hood and I guess her place in American writing.

DY: Mary is a wonderful writer, beautiful stylist and wonderful person. I feel very fortunate to be friends with her. I first became aware of her writing because she won that Flannery

O'Connor prize for her collection of stories in 1986. Then I met her and found her stories are just imminently teachable, and I had an opportunity to write some essays on Southern writers for the Columbia University Press; they were doing a book on short story writers and so I did essays on Marry Hood and Larry Brown. Larry Brown had come here for the Contemporary Literary Conference, and I had met him—he's a Mississippian so we had a lot to connect about—and I enjoyed writing on Larry Brown and on Mary. Then Mary herself told the editor of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* that she wanted me to write the essay on her so that's how I did that. What I like about these essays that I've written is that they're extremely accessible to students and they're online; there's the GALE Research Database and students can go on there—it's open, there's nothing arcane about them so I've enjoyed doing that. It's so much fun when students read something that their professors have written, so that's been my focus, Southern writers.

TS: Let's see, Bobbie Ann Mason you wrote about.

DY: Bobbie Ann Mason is a Kentucky writer and I met her in Nashville at the annual Southern Festival of Books that I went to with John Yow and there are always wonderful panels there. I saw so many literary figures there: Adrienne Rich, the poet; Greg Johnson, my friend and colleague; so I've always felt very fortunate in that I was writing about writers that I knew.

TS: Of course, I guess you met a lot because of John being senior editor for Longstreet Press for a while.

DY: I did and that was always fun to go to the conferences or just read books that he was working on. It really has sort of de-mystified the publishing process—in many ways it's a crap shoot just like anything else. You may be very, very good and still not get your work into print. Sadly enough, in the publishing world today, you do have to have an agent. So I've been very fortunate there in terms of writing about people, writers, that I cared about, who are very good writers and also in writing for my students.

TS: We were talking about mentoring earlier; I imagine you do a lot of—students come around and say, can I make a career in writing or how good is my writing, that kind of stuff?

DY: They do and I point them to the creative writers, if that's what they're wanting.

TS: But I know you do a lot of reading people's writings.

DY: I do that.

TS: Critiquing it for them.

DY: Yes. And lately, the past few years, it's been, when they apply for these graduate programs and they've got to write a statement of purpose, which is a really very interesting piece and sometimes, that could be the point that breaks you with these

admissions committees. If something stands out about your experience. I enjoy doing that. I just don't read fiction or poetry. When students say, "I've written a short story," I say, "Well, go to the creative writing people," because I don't want to do that.

TS: Well, let's talk a little bit about your teaching. Just the last class last Friday one of the students came up and said, "I've really enjoyed Dr. Yow; she's so enthusiastic about everything that she does."

DY: I would hope. I wouldn't want to be in there if I were bored. There's nothing more boring than to have to be an audience of somebody who's bored with what they're doing. But again, I see it as good fortune and hard work too; I think our class, the energy that comes from the teaching that we've done together, teaching this course ten times, teaching with an historian, is what really opened, for me the whole idea of inter-disciplinarity with American Studies and culture, whether you call it culture or history or ethnicity or whatever, it's understanding what shapes how a work is produced. Our most recent discussion in class, you know, is it the person, is it the moment, is the time, all the forces that go together. American Studies was perfect for me to get in there and do Southern culture.

TS: I guess American Studies is at its core history and literature.

DY: It is. I think American Studies as the Blind Man and the Elephant; it depends on where you go, what part of the elephant you grab. But yes, Tom, I think it is. I think the anthropologists get in there too and they get in there legitimately but it is primarily these disciplines of history and literature coming together.

TS: For me, it just enriches a history class if you know something about elements of fiction, for instance.

DY: Yes. And if you look at, as we do, if you look at historical documents, from the perspective of language, of rhetoric.

TS: We've done a lot with rhetoric this fall.

DY: We have. And the next time we teach this class I think we'll—that's something we'll start honing even more because I feel like, too, the wonderful energizing time of this campaign, this political campaign, THE campaign . . .

TS: Right. Well, when we're talking—and you can't get away from discussion of race in a Georgia history class because it's half the course, really, of race relations and with the particular Presidential election that we had this year it certainly made it all very relevant for people to be focusing on race and history.

DY: Oh it did. When I was doing the Intro to American Studies class in the spring, last spring, I played Obama's speech on race and we analyzed that.

- TS: Yes. Well, we've analyzed a number of speeches according to their rhetorical devices, and I guess we've spent a good part of the early semester just trying to talk about what rhetoric is.
- DY: And to get students conscious of rhetoric. Again, that's a very American Studies thing when they can look at a document.
- TS: So we've talked about historicizing literature, documents, literature, putting it all in a historical context. It's added side benefits for me too; I'm trained to teach a Sunday School class, a lot of which is literature; it's all literature, but some of it clearly was meant to be fiction and other parts have their fictionalized elements in it, I mean, something like the Book of Jonah for instance, had to be a work of fiction when it first came out; or the Song of Songs, a lot of poetry in the Bible. I guess everybody thinks that my Sunday school class is a history class since I . . .
- DY: Since you're an historian?
- TS: I approach it that way.
- DY: Well, it's funny, because the Bible, you know how people have laid claim to that. That year of Bible that I had at Agnes Scott served me well when I began to teach the World Literature course because, of course, you teach, or it's there in the anthology, if one chooses to teach the Hebraic literature, the sections of the Old Testament and certainly that of the New Testament too. So it certainly informs our culture.
- TS: Yes. Talk a little bit about your philosophy of teaching, what kind of approaches do you take in the classroom?
- DY: Ha-ha. Enlightenment. And it works both ways, the fact that I learn so much from students. It's so interesting that two of the students that I've been mentoring over the summer and over this fall are students that are very, very different from me, greatly, politically. Voted, you know, the other way. But that finally doesn't matter. Certainly I would hope that they can see the light. I think that I knew pretty early on that I would treat students the way I would want somebody to treat me, and I have always been uncomfortable—and even gotten angry—with people who will make fun of students' ignorance because they're here to learn, and they bring knowledge and expertise in to the classroom too that we don't have. I do see it as shared and collaborative. Now, I'm not to the point that I'm going to have them call me Dede and we're all equals here; I'm of the generation that yes, I am the authority figure in this classroom; I put out the syllabus, I choose the text.
- TS: Well, you're the one getting paid to teach the class, so you better know more than they do.
- DY: Yes. But I try to be very careful, I try to honor where that student is.

- TS: What I've learned from doing English literature with history is to really focus on the documents: I mean, I was moving that way already but in an English class, if you were teaching Shakespeare, you would think it was very, very odd if you never actually read any of Shakespeare's plays, but instead you spent all your time reading secondary accounts of biographies about Shakespeare or critiques of Shakespeare's plays. But we do that all the time in history classes where instead of letting people actually read what Abraham Lincoln said, we'll tell them what Lincoln said, as a secondary source. Once they've read the documents for themselves, in at least a limited sense, they're as much an expert about that document as you are. I mean, they can have opinions of their own because they've cut through the middleman and gotten straight to the document.
- DY: Right. And bring their contemporary sensibility to it and their contemporary understanding to it. So our job is to give them a context for it and bring in other sources, which are often primary sources.
- TS: Yes. But that's the historicizing of the text. From what I understand from you, there are some people in English that don't do that at all, right?
- DY: I guess they don't, yes.
- TS: Or seem to think that you don't pay attention to the historical context; you just read the document itself.
- DY: Close reading, right.
- TS: Which I don't understand at all.
- DY: No, I don't either, but then again, that's my sort of peculiar background, I think and what I find, when I did a Southern literature course—I was really aware that I needed to do the typical literary genres of fiction and poetry; I don't know why I felt hemmed in by that but I generally have other sources that are going to be historical and cultural sources. It just felt real narrow. And the students, I could feel them sort of straining against it when I would say, "All right, let's think about, this is 1964, what's happening?" They would say, "Well, what difference does that make?"
- TS: To me, I like the idea of interdisciplinary studies in large part because there is a bias out there; you see it all the time in the history students that are scared to death to take an English class and stay away from our Georgia History/Georgia Literature maybe because, I don't know what happened to them when they took World Literature or whatever a couple of years earlier, but something happened that they think they like history but they don't like English.
- DY: In some instances, and I remember vividly a student that we had several years ago, in some instances these students come in, the history students, "it's just the facts ma'am." I wonder if they're afraid of feeling, you know, afraid of having an emotional response to what they are reading, and so it's very safe for them to read non-fiction. Although it's



very difficult to read history and not have an emotional response, I think, depending on what it is.

TS: Yes. But do you get the same sense that there are English majors who are scared to take history classes?

DY: Yes, and oddly enough, what it seems to me that they're afraid of is that they're going to have to master some information. I do think there are people who are still teaching English, teaching literature classes, in which you come in and you just talk about the text, but you don't need to necessarily master information about the text. I mean, there is literary terminology; we have literary criticism courses and those are very rigorous and those are the ones the students are sort of afraid of, but I'm astounded at English students who come in and aren't accustomed to knowing that they need to know the time, the date, the place, all the externals about the text and that they're going to be tested on these. Or the biographical information about the author. So it's almost like it's a book club; I can read this and just chat a little bit instead of experiencing and approaching it as an intellectual, analytical experience. That's where the history students are very good; they tend to be more analytical than the literary students, than the straight lit students. The American Studies students come in with that predisposition for popular culture that they've been critiquing for some time and are sort of experts in that way of approaching a text that their other disciplines or courses don't recognize or let them recognize.

TS: I guess you've always believed in a lot of class discussion in your courses.

DY: I have. Yes, that model of somebody standing in the front and dispensing wisdom is elitist to me. Although I start off the semester in the first couple of classes I'll lecture unashamedly and tell them that's what I'm doing because they need a foundation, but then—and you know this too, Tom—once they get interested, they'll go out and read on their own and say, “Well, I read this,” or “I saw this.” You have to have that intellectual energy going in the class or it's not going to work. I've had classes when it didn't happen. That's a sad thing; there's nothing more depressing than coming out of a class and saying, “That was awful.” But I use the old tricks—reading quizzes, quizzes, so that when you come in you've read the material. I talked to a colleague the other day who's teaching one of those big classes—and this is new to us in English—I think there are sixty-five in this class, it's a World Lit. class, ugh!

TS: Obviously they don't do a lot of writing in there.

DY: She asked them to write down a synopsis of the play that they had read. Twenty-five of them were able to do it. She dismissed the rest of them.

TS: Wow.

DY: Why aren't they coming prepared to class? Because they don't think they have to. So I do have that side to me that I give quizzes. You do the same thing. I'm not going to apologize for that. And students will say, “I'm so glad that we're having a quiz because

it really makes me get it read.” So as for teaching philosophy, have we done that, you think, enlightenment with strict adherence to a mastery of information that we hope will somehow morph into knowledge and wisdom to carry into the streets, right?!

TS: Let’s talk a little bit about how Kennesaw has changed since 1982. How would you describe Kennesaw State, the intellectual life at Kennesaw State when you arrived and where are we today?

DY: When I arrived I could find, as I have said earlier, I found great intellectual sustenance in my department, among my colleagues. I also got out beyond my department and a lot of the committees I’ve been on have been outside my department, and I think that that sort of kept me going in many ways. So that for example, when I saw my department fall into what can happen when departments are growing rapidly, and there’s very little funding, and people start fighting over who’s going to teach the composition course and who’s going to teach the upper level and all of that. So the discussions are no longer about interesting ideas, but they’ve become ideological or they get off into something else. To come out of your office and hang out in the hall with people and talk about things is so much fun; it’s happening again, I’ve noticed, in my department.

TS: Is it?

DY: Well, as you know, and I’m sure most people know, the English department went through a pretty terrible period of a kind of civil war. Then it takes time for people to get over civil wars, as we know; I mean, we’ve had 150 years since the one we had in this country and we still aren’t over it.

TS: Right. Well, you had battles over at least two department chairs that were I’m sure very uncomfortable to be part of the English department when there was a lot of controversy over the chairs.

DY: Yes. And I see that, this relates to Kennesaw too. Kennesaw is evolving to the point that it’s understood that you need to have a governance system that’s participatory when you have a group of people like faculty. They have to participate. If you do not permit them to participate and give them avenues to participate, then they’re going to go outside those avenues. I’ve been caught up in governance; well, I say caught up in it, Ron Matson and I worked for years on a grievance policy for this institution and it just seems so puny now and so dark ages. I know the Dark Ages weren’t really the dark ages, so let’s erase that one too! But you know, now we have an Ombud’s office, we have, we’re evolving and that’s a good thing. I see the hires that we’re making in my department as being incredibly dynamic, intellectually strong, interesting, good people. I have seen new hires and new faculty coming from other departments that are, particularly in science, that are completely focused on their scholarship. In teaching, yes, we’ve got to do that; this is not humanity versus science; I’m not saying that that’s the case, but I also don’t think that Kennesaw is shifting to an R-1 institution. Since I have been here people have been worried about, “How much do I have to publish to get promoted?” I think it’s perennial, that’s part of being in the academic world, wherever you are. The young people coming

into my department, the young faculty are so engaged in their teaching, are so engaged with their students that it's just joyful and makes all that political stuff—of course, it's settled down now and with Bill Rice as chair, you know, here's a man whose father and grandfather were Methodists ministers and had bricks thrown at their windows during the Civil Rights movement, so the English department is nothing to him.

TS: He can take the bricks through the windows.

DY: Yes, the metaphorical bricks. I see Kennesaw as being arrived, just in terms of how faculty are being treated; I think our governance system is working now and I would hope we're going to still draw people who want to teach, but we're bigger, Tom. It's going to be a different mix. We were all so committed to teaching—that was the first thing. But were I to come in now I might think differently, I might be more concerned about my writing.

TS: Probably better be if you were coming right now.

DY: Yes.

TS: People do what they're expected to do or are hired to do. At any rate, it sounds like in the English department you're still focusing on teaching with scholarship.

DY: I haven't been on the T&P committee in the English department in several years; in fact, my service on T&P has been on the college level so I can't say for sure that that's the case; it is really sort of anecdotal in talking to people and just what I see them doing and what I hear them talking about.

TS: So what do you see as the future for Kennesaw? Where are we going?

DY: Hm. We're certainly expanding in terms of our facilities. We'll get a football team.

TS: It certainly looks that way.

DY: That would be fun! I'm excited about that.

TS: Yes, I'd like to go out and watch them play football.

DY: Same here. We've got this interdisciplinary program, I guess it's kind of a department, the center, what is it?

TS: The Interdisciplinary Studies?

DY: The Interdisciplinary Studies, the master's degree, we're going to get more graduate programs. We are facing, I think, the problem that universities have and that is with a two or three tiered faculty; but you know in a way we had that when I came. When I came in with a Ph.D. and there were people with master's degrees, those that didn't go on

and get doctoral degrees or were, and there are still some, there are a few left in departments around the campus . . . that's your union card. You've got to have your Ph.D. But we'll be doing what I think many institutions are doing and that's exploiting people in terms of . . .

TS: The adjunct faculty.

DY: The adjunct faculty. I hate that that's going to happen, and especially in terms of budget. I'm going to hang around and watch. I'm going to be here cheering at the football games and basketball games.

TS: And you're going to come back and teach on occasion when you feel like it, I guess.

DY: Indeed, yes. Certainly our course, which can be triple-listed.

TS: It is triple-listed.

DY: It is triple-listed and no reason why it can't be. If we can serve that many areas then it's a perfect course.

TS: Triple-listed meaning that they can sign up for American Studies credit, English credit or History credit. So as long as you keep grading the American Studies and the English students, I'll be glad to grade the history students.

DY: It's fun.

TS: Well, what have we left out that we should have talked about?

DY: Hm. I can't think of anything at this time. It's been a fun interview. Thank you so much. It's great to be on this end.

TS: You're welcome.

DY: Oh, I do want to keep doing oral histories, interviewing with you.

TS: Well, we will continue to do them.

DY: Thank you.

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