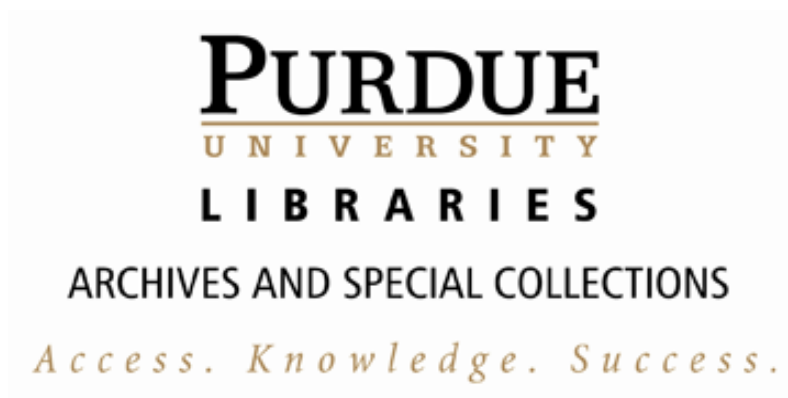


Erich Klinghammer Interview

Conducted by Katherine Markee on November 17, 2008



The following interview was conducted with Professor Erich Klinghammer [EK], Professor of the Psychological Sciences for the Purdue University Oral History Program. It took place on Monday, November 17, 2008 at his residence in Battleground.

The interviewer is Katherine Markee [KM], the Oral History Librarian.

KM: Welcome. Tell us a little bit about where you were born, your parents, siblings, and early years.

EK: I was born in 1930 in Germany and I was the only child of my parents. My father was Ouis Klinghammer, and Marie Klinghammer. At the time he worked in a mine that produces clay because the area where we lived east of Kassel was rich with this special kind of clay and the whole industry was built up there for melding crucibles. That's where he was working and it was quite a hard job. We used to go and bring him lunch at noon. In 1930 is when I was born, and that was the time when the National Socialists, that Nazis, began to start, and so my dad wanted to get away from the job, so he enlisted in the police in the city of Kassel. That was the city police. That's what Ouis did. After four years we moved from the village where we were to Kassel and stayed from 1934 to 1938. Then we moved to Wimar, which is [inaudible] east of Germany and we moved to Wimar and that's where I went to high school. For my school, it went until 1945 when the war was over and I began to work as an interpreter for the American army. I made some contacts. That was essentially how I became friends with American

soldiers. One of whom was Paul Ingham. His dad was a doctor in Iowa and he sponsored me for me to come over to the United States.

KM: Can you tell us where you went to high school in Wimar? Is that where you went to high school?

EK: Yes.

KM: What was it like? Was it a big school?

EK: Well it was the only high school that was an all-boys high school. The girl's high school was separate. We had English, Latin, Mathematics, Biology, and History, that's all I can remember.

KM: Ok. Were there any student clubs that you could belong to, or student organizations?

EK: No, we didn't have that at the time. I was a gymnast; we had gymnastics and we played soccer, but mostly it was just academics because we went to school in the morning or in the afternoon. We had to share the school because the original high school had become a medical facility during the war, hospital for soldiers.

KM: Did you go to college after that?

EK: Oh no. I never finished high school because of the war. Like I said, I worked for the American army. I'd apply to come to the United States and finally in 1951 I came over. I went to Chicago. My parents meanwhile had immigrated also, so I lived with my parents.

KM: Were they living in Chicago, too?

EK: Yes. When I went to high school, forget the parents, I was there first, and I went to do night school in Chicago, and there I finished and graduated from high school in this country. I worked for about a year and then I was drafted in the American army and I was sent to Austria. Because I spoke German I was admitted to Intelligence in Austria and I used to interview returned German prisoners who were in Russia. In 1955, two months before my army time was up, Austria became independent. It was no longer being occupied. I became an American citizen while in the army in Austria. Before that there were several of us, one hundred and twenty-three of us who were from Eastern European countries and in order to have the protection of the American army in case some of the Russians caught us we were made American citizens. When we were discharged honorably, then our home-place, Chicago, went to Federal courts and became citizens. This was after two and a half years. Normally it takes five years. I became a citizen in Chicago in Federal court and by that time I also had the G.I. bill and I went to the University of Chicago with my G.I. bill.

KM: Very nice.

EK: There I was first in pre-med then I went to psychology and then at the end of my time I discovered a course in ethology was given by Professor Eckert S. [?]. Ethology is the study of animal behavior from an evolutionary point of view. I did a dissertation on imprinting in dogs. Then after I graduated with a Ph. D. I stayed at the University of Chicago for several years as a faculty member. I think it was

in 1968 I was offered a job at Purdue University in the Psychology department and I taught there for twenty-six years. I taught ethology, psychology, and various other courses.

KM: Okay. How did the offer come to you? Did someone contact you about the opening at Purdue?

EK: Yes, I was recruited by Henry Crawford who was the head of the Biology department and when he discovered that my degree was in Psychology I was then moved into the psychology department.

KM: Okay, good. Tell us about how your interest in the wolves and things go on after you got here with your research.

EK: Well, my dissertation was in wing doves and I became allergic to them so I had to give them up. When I moved to Purdue we bought a farm in the country, seventy-five acres, and I got my first two wolves from the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago, Coco and Kathy. That's how it started, and gradually we improved and enlarged until now its thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-seven a year at the wolf park. We are kind of unique because we are the only people in the world who do demonstrations with wolves and the American Bison that we have. All of the wolves are hand-raised, bottle-fed from the time they were small, so they are quite socialized to people. We have an education program where the general public comes, school groups, including from Purdue University. We also have interns who come from various parts of the world who spend three months here. We also do a behavioral research program with our wolves and our bison.

KM: Can you share anything about your teaching? Are you at the university working with the students? Are there any specific courses? Something in applied ethnology, was that one of the ones that you did?

EK: It's not ethnology, it's ethology.

KM: Ethology, okay, thanks.

EK: Well I taught introduction to ethology and I taught various seminars. One year I taught introductory psychology because they were short of staff so I taught that. It was a big course.

KM: A little bit about that Isle Royal. Could you share a little bit about that?

EK: When I came here Dr. [inaudible], we became acquainted and he became my friend. We had a group here discussing animal behavior and one winter I went with him to Isle Royal. We drove up there in his car and then we went to an airport and there we were taken by plane to Isle Royal where wolf research was carried out at that time by Dr. Walt Peterson who was his graduate student and who had also taken my course at Purdue. When I got up there I spent a week there. As soon as we landed Ralf came back from his flight and I went into that plane, Don Murray was the pilot and he flew me around the island, tour the wolves on the ice. The plane was quite low. About fifteen feet about and maybe about fifty, sixty feet away from the wolves. They totally ignored it because they were so used to it. So that was interesting to watch. I spent a whole week there studying

wolves that we could see during the day when they came by. That was very exciting.

KM: Did you make any other trips there, sir?

EK: No, that's the only trip I made at the time.

KM: Oh, ok. Where do you get the wolves that you get now?

EK: The first wolves we got from the Brookfield Zoo, and then we got some more from the Philadelphia Zoo and that's our foundation stock.

KM: Okay. You have a stamp out there and you get volunteers. Tell us a little bit about some of the activity.

EK: Well, we have paid staff. We have a managing director. We have a former student, Patricia Goodman, she is our currier. She is in charge of the wolves; she does the observations. We have Monty Sloan who is a staff photographer. He is the best wolf photographer in the world. He has our website and he sells wolf pictures. We have these seminars and people come in and learn about wolf behavior. That's what we do in addition to the lectures to school groups that come to our park. And Monty Sloan is in charge of the lectures as well .We have photo seminars where people can be instructed how to take animal pictures. Monty Sloan runs that. People actually go in with the wolves so they can get good pictures without having to shoot the picture through the fence.

KM: Very good. You have bison out there. Is there a dog-wolf hybrid or anything like that?

EK: No, we don't have any hybrids. But we do the wolf-bison demonstration every Sunday at two o'clock.

KM: Oh do you? Where do the bison come from?

EK: I bought the bison from a dealer here in, I forget the name of the place, not too far from here. The first two bison we got from the local zoo because they just had two of them. We liberated them from the zoo and we brought them out here. We got some more from a dealer in, I forget the name of the place, not too far from here. We decided to do a wolf-bison demonstration. We had colleague visiting from Finland and we wanted to do something special for him, so we put the wolves together with the bison. That was our first demonstration. The wolf had never seen a bison and the bison had never seen a wolf. They walked up and they sniffed noses and the wolf went around the side and the bison realized it was a wolf and they charged him. That was our first wolf-bison demonstration. We've done it ever since and we are the only people in the world who do that.

KM: Interesting. And you've got some good pictures of that, too, with that photographer, I'd imagine.

EK: Oh yeah.

KM: You got some awards. One is the Sagamore. Tell us how you got that Sagamore of the Wabash.

EK: Well somebody put me in and I got the award. Shelia Klinker came up one day and she presented it to me. You know who Shelia Klinker is.

KM: Yes, I do.

EK: She presented it to me.

KM: That's very nice. You got a nice salutation. You got it framed, huh?

EK: The nice part about that is that people in the conservation world [inaudible] when you get a reward like that from the government it catches the eye of a lot of other people as well.

KM: Very special. You got something from the America Society [inaudible] Animals for your research with wolves. You got another award from that at one time.

EK: Oh yeah. Somebody put me in and I went to the [inaudible] and I got an award for that.

KM: That's very nice. One of the things that we usually ask is in retirement activities, but you've already covered that. You keep pretty busy though don't you?

EK: Do what?

KM: Well we usually ask what you're doing in retirement but you've just been doing it all of the time.

EK: Oh sure. Of course I don't do as much as they do. They work, and I have staff who do that.

KM: But you kind of take care of the facility.

EK: Oh yeah.

KM: Do you happen to have any traditions at Purdue that come to mind? Do you have a favorite at all that you'd like to share with us?

EK: Traditions?

KM: Traditions at Purdue? Anything special that comes to mind?

EK: Well some of my students put me in for, of what is that called, I can't remember.

KM: Some sort of a teaching thing?

EK: No, not for teaching. It's where students propose a faculty member and then you become a member of the group.

KM: Oh, it must be an honorary fraternity of some sort?

EK: No, name some of the student groups for me.

KM: Oh, like Mortar Board?

EK: Yes, that's what it was. So I became a faculty sponsor I guess. They invited me. The students pick you. Two of my students picked me for that, the Mortar Board. I'm not very active anymore there because the students are gone so I don't go there anymore.

KM: Let me ask you this, some of the researchers that come out to Wolf Park, do they come back? Do you have some that are coming on a regular basis when they're doing that or does it vary?

EK: We have, in fact today one is coming. He's from North Florida. His name is Clive Wind. He is a faculty member and he uses our wolves for some research projects. There's a group in Hungary who compared the wolves and dogs. People would point at something and they found out the dogs would pay attention to that but the wolves would not very well. They concluded then that because dogs have been domesticated for so long they pay more attention to people. This fellow from Florida came up here and we offered him the chance to work with our wolves and it turns out that our wolves, the way we socialize them, have no problem. You sit there in front and there are two pockets and there is food in one. The wolves sit in front and you point and go "It's right there." The wolves are as good, if not better than the dogs. We discovered that here.

KM: You worked that out, huh?

EK: Yeah. Clive is coming today with a student and they are going to do some more of the same.

KM: Do you have an outstanding event in your life that you would like to share with the researchers? Anything special?

EK: What kind of event?

KM: An outstanding event or special even in your life. Anything that comes to mind?

EK: Well the first one was when I came to this country. That was a special event. Then of course when I went to the American Army. Then when my parents came over. They lived here for a while until they retired and went back to Germany. Of

course I got married the first time and then after forty years I got divorced and I got married again. I have a daughter. She lives in California. She is a very gifted person. She is a Librarian and a Linguist. She speaks German, English, Hungarian, American Sign Language, Italian, and Spanish as well.

KM: What sort of a Librarian? Does she work in an Academic Institution?

EK: Yes, she is at a college in California, but I don't know the name of it.

KM: Sure, okay, that's alright. In closing, anything special that you'd like to share with the researchers, Dr. Klinghammer?

EK: With what researchers?

KM: Ones that are going to be using the tape to study the University. Anything special that you would like to say in closing?

EK: What I liked about Purdue where I taught I found absolute academic freedom. No one ever interferes with what I taught except that you had to only teach that which was your specialty. In other words, if I were to make a political statement I would have to do it outside of the classroom. That was my private point-of-view, but I was not speaking as a professor of the University, which is common. You don't do that. If I was a Political Scientist it would be different, I could talk about politics. I liked that. Of course, I had my colleagues at the vet school as well as the Wildlife department. In that case, Purdue was a good place.

KM: And you enjoyed it, and now you're living a full life as well out there at the park.

EK: Oh yeah, sure.

KM: Thank you very much Dr. Klinghammer. Appreciate that. Sorry we had the problem before but you're nice, and we'll be in touch. Thank you very much.

End of Interview

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