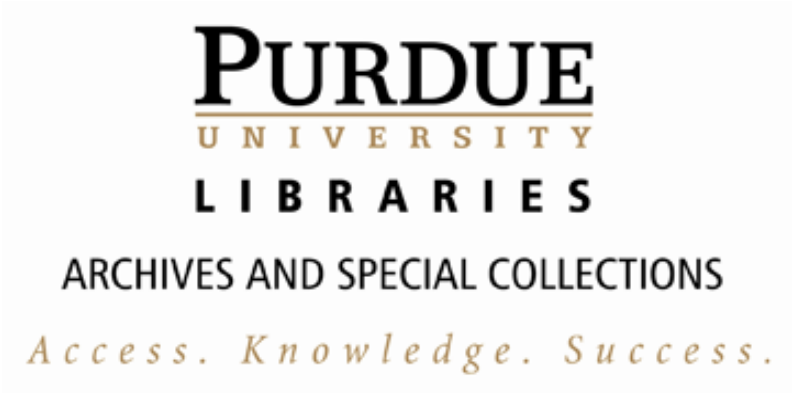
Gebisa Ejeta Interview

Conducted by Katherine Markee on January 29, 2010



The following interview was conducted with Gebisa Ejeta (GE) for the Purdue University Oral History Project. It took place on Friday, January 9, 2010, at Stewart Center. The interviewer is Katherine Markee (KM), the Oral History Librarian.

KM: Welcome and good afternoon to you.

GE: Thank you.

KM: Thank you. Tell me when and where you were born and your parents and early years.

GE: Yes, I was born on the Ethiopian calendar, it's a different calendar, but on June 1, 1950. In a small village in Ethiopia called Wollonkomi. It's in the Oromira region, west central Ethiopia. My parents were Moto Ayano, my mother, and my father, Ejeta Dassa.

KM: Okay, and did they do…what was it...farming? Is that agriculture there?

GE: Yes, they were…we were all in a very small farming community. Everybody that lived there had farming to engage in.

KM: Now tell us a little about where you went to grade school and then high school. Go ahead. That's interesting.

GE: Yes I…there wasn't any formal school when I was a small child but there was a church school and every kid that has parental encouragement attended the church school and my mother sent me there and we were all doing well and then when other communities had opportunity to attend formal education, we called it

English school. We didn't have any opportunity until one year I was about 10 years old someone who had kids our age had the means and started to own school for their children and so people who knew them…

KM: Could go to…

GE: Could go to them.

KM: Was it in the village where you lived?

GE: It was in the same village but those of us from humble backgrounds were not included in that. We couldn't attend. Later on, there was community pressure and people approached this family, and whether or not they would expand the school instead of holding it on their compound, build up, or rent a small unit in the village or put it together. And there was already a house that was there so they agreed to have a school where everyone could attend.

KM: Where everyone could go, that's right, after grade school. Then you went to what we call high school but it was not in your village though?

GE: Actually before that…

KM: Okay.

GE: the school that I described was only there for a year. Then in one year, we went through grades one through three. So then at the end of the year we were told we completed.

KM: I think I should have signed up for that school. [Both laugh] Would have made it a lot easier on my parents.

GE: And so they wanted to have room for other kids to come and do that and so they said, “You’re done” and that’s…

KM: Boy, that’s acceleration.

GE: That’s when we looked for other opportunity and my mother found and made arrangements for me to attend a school about twenty kilometers away from there. That meant that we had to walk and we couldn’t do it every day and so we boarded a place in the small town where this school was and so we would walk up the twenty kilometers on Sunday and then come back late Friday, walk down the twenty kilometers and the whole week we would stay there. And so we did that from grade four to grade eight.

KM: Okay, was the school very large though? Were there a lot of children there, children from your village also went there?

GE: No I the only one from my village that year and then the next few years others came.

KM: Others came too. Well that’s nice.

GE: And it was a big school. I don’t recall how many hundred kids were there but I would suspect maybe close 1,000 or 800.

KM: Was the language in English?

GE: Yes, beginning in grade four. Beginning in fourth grade every subject we took was in English except there was a language for the local Ethiopian language and

5:00 we did that as a language class until us…and then there was this acceleration that started in the village where I come from and so kids that did well would get double promotion. And first semester I did well, I stood first in my class so I was pushed to fifth grade which meant we went through it fairly fast and then at the end of that there was a huge challenge.

KM: Would that have been eighth grade?

GE: Eighth grade, yeah. Then after that, you take a national exam at the end of eighth grade and then depending on the score, you may choose what school to go to and if you did well you get your choice. I was fortunate enough to have done well and then what I choose was an agricultural high school. It was a boarding school. The reason why I choose it was not because I was interested in agriculture but because it was a boarding school and the school that I attend was put up by Oklahoma State University.

KM: I was going to ask you how did that come about, some of the AID funding?

GE: That's right. In those days, it was a continuation of the European Marshal Plan. Were the U.S. government was helping poor developing countries establish their institutions of learning and research and services. And so what they would do would be they would identify a U.S. university that is interested in international development work and they would give them a contract to start the school or help strengthen an existing school. And so Oklahoma State University got the nod for

working with Ethiopia and they went there to establish a college and park themselves in the beginning in a place where there was some facility to start the college until the new college they were building was completed. And so when they left to their compound where the college was going to be instead of abandoning this place they left behind they converted it into an agricultural high school. And made a connection between the agricultural high school and the college where some of the better students who did well in the high school…

KM: Could go on…

GE: could go on to the college and those others that didn't would then join the government and work in the agricultural extension service to help rural land community development.

KM: And I know in high school, I know you played some basketball and volleyball?

GE: I did, I did. I was a very, very small kid when I went in and all of a sudden I grew tall and because of the boarding school there was a lot of peer encouragement or peer pressure however you look at it and we encouraged each other. We participated in all kinds of activities and then naturally I drifted to sports where my height was an advantage and I picked both volleyball and basketball.

KM: Big help. [Laughs]

GE: Yes and so I…before long I was on the varsity team both in men's volleyball and basketball.

KM: [Agrees] In high school, was it just for boys only or was it…

GE: Yes. It was only boys.

KM: And you lived right there?

GE: We lived on campus and that's… If you can imagine a lot of these kids coming from rural communities, particularly very poor upbringing, and so all of a sudden, you put them in a boarding school that's fairly similar to schools in the United States. And so there is a huge cultural shock in a positive sense later on but you come from rural villages where you didn't have enough to eat and you know no clothing to speak of and all of a sudden.

KM: Really different?

GE: Very different. And so we were provided for by the college, by the high school. We get clothing a couple of times a year. We get hot meals three times a day, and cakes and cookies.

KM: The regular boarding school that you would attend.

GE: That's right.

KM: Who were the teachers? Did Oklahoma State also, I mean as far as the instruction was concerned?

GE: Yeah, all of our teachers were from Oklahoma, even in the high school, and when we went to college, and they were from there as well. And so we got an
10:00 excellent education. It was… These were very impressionable years for typical young kids. And so coming from communities where you have your own culture

but not exposed to international community, there is so much education that would go on. And so I credit my high school education as giving me a great foundation for both professional growth and also personal growth as well.

KM: Right. Were the classes very large?

GE: No, no the whole school was 200 kids.

KM: So you really got a lot of individual?

GE: A lot of individual mentoring.

KM: Now to me that would be a big help for the ones who are really coming from a different primary level school.

GE: They did but you remember that you got that opportunity on the basis of your score and a lot of these kids even though they came from poor backgrounds and poor school systems and so on, these are bright kids and so we were fifty being admitted in any one year and we have two sections. Section A and B so 9A, 9B, 10A, 10B and all the way to 12A, 12B and so we had one dormitory for the twenty-five kids in one section and so it's personal growth and talking about is you are put in a dormitory with twenty-four other kids and you stay with them all four years. And so you've got twenty-four different personalities to deal with and so…but we were a community, very community growth and it teaches you how to work and live with people and also you develop brotherhood and always just like kids in fraternities here and it's been a great experience.

KM: Right. Is the high school still going?

GE: No. In fact after we graduated, I was the last…I was in the last class of the high school and at the end of that it was converted into a junior college and now it's a university college. In fact, I just visited it after the World Food Prize and it's a college of agriculture of 2,000 students now.

KM: Wow, interesting. And then from there you went to the…now the college is called Haramaya [University] and that was close in…right near the school?

GE: No, no in fact it was…you know I went from the village where I grew up in, I went west 300 kilometers and the college I went to was on the eastern part of the country, about 500 kilometers and it's in the opposite ends of the country. That was where it was…

KM: Located?

GE: The college was located, and we went there.

KM: Can you tell us a little about campus life and did you parents…were they able to come and visit you while you were there?

GE: No, the culture of parents visiting kids in college and so on doesn't exist there.

KM: Okay, you go home.

GE: Yeah, you go home. You do the long travel and so parents don't really engage in…they have a lot more other problems to worry about.

KM: They got enough to take care of at home. They know you're being taken care of.

GE: That's right.

KM: Did you play in athletics?

GE: Yes, I did and just to give you background now, I went to high school that was run by Oklahoma State University and was 200 students. And the college was run by the same Oklahoma State University and now we have about 400 kids so double the population but again, on the bigger scale. It was a very small community. Very tight knit community. And more mentoring again by faculty both Ethiopians and Americans and the one thing that I can say about both the high school and the college is not only you get good education but also there is knowledge base that is inundated and inculcated in you about serving the country. It's part of what in this country is called the land grant university motto. You get education and with that education, you go back and serve community through agricultural education, agricultural research, and technology generation
15:00 and so on. So that was the kind of knowledge that this linkage with Oklahoma State provided to us.

KM: Very good foundation.

GE: Wonderful foundation.

KM: And worked out nicely for what your career path took.

GE: I give credit to that upbringing, to that foundation.

KM: Let's see afterward then you were…before you came to Purdue you were a research assistant. Is that before you came to Purdue after you graduated then what came next?

GE: Alright, I had finished college and if I may say this, the college I went to, in my time instead of a four-year program, was a five-year program. The reason why it's a five-year program is they put in a service year where you would leave the campus and sent out in different directions in various areas whether it's in education, research, or in technology transfer. Help in the agricultural development of the country. The service is important to whom you're providing the service to but the growth for us was wonderful as well. You've had three years of college education and now you're sent out at the end of the third year to go out and service.

KM: Somewhere in the country.

GE: Somewhere in the country and during that service year you get the realities and understanding of the realities in rural communities in your country. We come back really full, strengthened by the need to serve and then you come back and you finish your five year in college and graduate. At the end of the fifth year, when we graduated, the university inherently will choose a certain number of kids in the group from the graduating class and identify those that have potential to be on the faculty. And so you would serve there for about a year or two and then they'll send you overseas to get your graduate education. So I was one of those lucky ones to be retained by the university there to be potential faculty member. And then I worked there for about fifteen months and there was an opportunity to go to Canada on a scholarship and I didn't want to go to Canada. It's too cold and then finally I was fortunate enough to find an opportunity to come to Purdue.

KM: Tell us how that came about.

GE: It was a very chance happening.

KM: Lot of things occur that way.

GE: That's right. A chance happening that a professor from Purdue University made a major discovery in his sorghum research and to pursue further the research he was doing he chose Ethiopia to come and visit and he'd never been outside the United States and so…

KM: Was this Professor Axtell?

GE: Yes, John Axtell, and so John Axtell would seek some assistance from other people and he would get to know the person who was my mentor when I was a college student. And then when I was serving there he was my boss and so he wrote to Dr. Borhani* saying that he wants to come to Ethiopia and would like to travel looking at some sorghum varieties there and collect them. And so he said, "Sure" and there would be a young man by the name of Gebisa who would be accompanying us on this travel and so at the end of the week of working with him he said he is impressed by this young man. Was it possible to having him come and study at Purdue? He said, In fact, it would work very well because he had just decided not to go to Canada and he'd maybe consider Purdue and so I jumped at that and that's how it happened.

KM: [Laughs] That's very nice. That worked out well. But then after…you stayed here and got your PhD and then you stayed from there?

GE: That's right. I stayed here and did both my masters and PhD under John Axtell and…

KM: Did you do your research in Ethiopia?

GE: No, no. All my…both my masters and PhD research were conducted here at Purdue and Purdue was a center of excellence in global sorghum research, even then. And professor Axtell and his colleagues were recognized for their area of research. Particularly nutritional quality area and so there was a federal grant
20:00 from the U.S. government that was coming to Purdue to allow that. And so I worked both for my master's and PhD in the sort of nutritional quality area and that's what I worked on. And at the end of that when it was time for me to return to Ethiopia, the situation changed back home. Ethiopia, the emperor was overthrown by communist group and the country had identified itself with the U.S.S.R. and relations with the U.S. had soured and conditions for a lot of people in the country were not very good and there was civil war between factions over there and I was encouraged not to return. But I was very eager to go back and serve in Africa and fortunately I found an opportunity.

KM: [Agrees] That's where that…political in Sudan…

GE: That's right and so I joined an international crop research center that was funded by the United Nation development program. They were good enough to hire me and I was fortunate enough to get the job and so I was assigned in the Sudan, work there for five years, and it's one of the most satisfying parts of my career where I was able to develop the first drought tolerant sorghum hybrid and

promoted that commercially in the country and that was really very successful. And so it happened that I went there in 1979 and the hybrid was released at the end of 1983.

KM: Was Purdue well-funded at all for the research over there when you were doing that?

GE: Yes, the research at the time was funded by the United Nation develop program. Very well-funded and very well supported, and so it was a two-man program, there was an Indian fellow who was working on millets and I was working on sorghum and we were well funded by our center, very well supported and national program that we worked with accepted us very well and so it just began I guess. There's no other way of saying it. Very satisfying.

KM: Right, and then I guess the next stage is Purdue right?

GE: That's right. At the end of five years when…

KM: Did you keep in touch with Purdue during the time you were in the Sudan?

GE: Yes, in fact the organization that hired me at that time part of the fringe benefits was you would get an air ticket to go back to your home country I knew I wasn't going to be able to go to Ethiopia. So I asked if I could designate West Lafayette, Indiana as my home base and so we used to come here for vacation every year and we lived there for five years.

KM: Were you married at that time?

GE: That's right. Sudan is next door to Ethiopia and so we never could travel unfortunately, Ethiopia in five years but we were able to come back here every year. And so that contact has been very useful because I was able to remain in touch with people here and when there was opportunity here on the faculty people said, "Oh, how about asking Gebisa if he would apply?" And so they encouraged me to apply and it was a godsend because by then, our daughter, who was born here in West Lafayette was getting to be of school age and their wasn't a school for her and so we decide maybe it's best to come back here and where I could have a professional activity and my family would have a home base here and that's how we ended up here.

KM: Let me ask you about your family. Where did you meet your wife?

GE: My wife and I met in college and…

KM: She's from Ethiopia?

GE: She's from Ethiopia, she was a freshman the year I was working on campus and we got to meet there. And so I came alone here anyway because we were not married.

KM: When you came for your graduate?

GE: When I came to graduate school. And so between my master's and PhD, my major professor John Axtell was invited for...to give a talk in another African country, unfortunately he couldn't accept the invitation because he had another commitment to go to Austria about the same time but he was kind enough, he

asked the U.S. AID if he would send me instead. He told them he had a good African student working with him, he would do well representing the program,
25:00 "Would you mind if I sent him?" They said, "Well if you have the money and you have confidence on the young man, you can send him." So I wrote my girlfriend that I left behind and that I may be coming that way and I did a two, three, or four week vacation and in that time we got married and I was able, again fortunate enough to get her out of the country at that time. Even though conditions were not good, and so that's how we came back and so two years after I've already been in the United States so she came with me.

KM: That's very good.

GE: Yeah.

KM: Let's talk about the new research. You're on the Purdue faculty? You shared some of these others with…for the interview. Go ahead.

GE: Yes…

KM: Did you continue your association with Dr. Axtell while you were here?

GE: Right. He also worked on sorghum and that's how I studied under him. And remember I mentioned earlier that the sorghum program at Purdue was very well recognized under his leadership but a lot of all that we did before that was in the nutritional quality area. To making the crop more nutritious who lives on it or animals that are being fed on it. And so people in animal science and biochemistry and agronomy worked on that. And so the premise upon which I

was hired is Purdue is getting to be a center of excellence and we need to grow beyond nutritional quality and so we need to do other research areas on sorghum and the area of drought tolerance and disease resistance and so on. They wanted to hire somebody to do that. And so I came back even though we all worked on sorghum, the division of labor is I was working on drought tolerance and parasitic weed resistance. Those were the two areas that I chose then and other diseases resistance as well. And so John and I divided the program that way but I still enjoyed the mentorship from him.

KM: Oh, sure.

GE: In the early days and so today we've become a much more comprehensive program in our research area. And so it's among the very well-known programs in the world.

KM: And you did very well here, right? Sometimes people say it takes a while; you have to keep working on it, right?

GE: That's correct. And we did…part of the reason why it takes time is one research is like a building block. You discover something, you add on top of that and gradually, keeping in mind all the way through that this cumulative knowledge would lead to solving real life problem in a community and so on. And so that's one and the other reason why it takes time is it's not only the science and the breakthroughs in science that helps communities or people it is an institutional building process that needs to be there and so you need to work with people in developing countries to build their communities, build their institutions. For

example, one of the things that I was credited and was…this value chain approach to making a technology work in a community. And so we had developed drought tolerant, parasitic weed resistant sorghums but it wasn't being taken up. So I thought of a way to get that catalyzed and so we put together a technology package that included a water conservation measure, soil fertility, and so that not only are they able to produce more, but can they produce surplus enough so that they would market the surplus. And then being able to afford better investments that are necessary for buying fertilizers and buying seeds and so on. And also that doesn't just happen and so you have to help create the market opportunities for…

KM: The chain.

GE: That's right; the value chain approach is you know the farm practices and the inputs that need to be there. And so the input market for seeds and fertilizers and then the produce at the end and to market the grain and also in possible linking
30:00 them with things that would add value to the raw material that is being produced. And in our situation, we talked to bakeries to accept sorghum instead of wheat or to make composite flour. We worked with cookie factory or the breweries and so those kinds of extracurricular activities need to take place in a culture where the public private partnership is very well developed as we have in the United States it's not an issue but in developing countries…

KM: It's a big thing.

GE: A lot of that would have to be developed.

KM: Right and continue to work a lot hadn't been done before in that area so that works. The World Food Prize…how did you, I read that you got a phone call and I share a similar thing. Dr. Geddes was quoted with a similar thing. He got a phone call and they – he wasn't sure and so he transferred it over to somebody else and they called him about the medal. He told me that and so…

GE: [Laughs]

KM: So I think I get the same reaction so much it'd be another survey. I'd hang up.

GE: Right, I received a phone call from the World Food Prize Foundation and I had just gone to Washington…

KM: Was that after you had done the testimony?

GE: I went to…I gave a testimony to the U.S. Senate for relations committee.

KM: It was good. I downloaded that it was very good.

GE: Oh, thank you.

KM: Excellent, well done.

GE: Thank you. And so the president of the World Food Prize Foundation started with giving me a compliment about the testimony and following that he started talking about the World Food Prize week that was coming up in October and immediately I just made the connection and I said, "Oh, he's calling me to ask me to speak at the ceremony."

KM: We're getting the program together. [Laughs]

GE: That's right. So he said, "You know the program is really developing. It's looking good and we're…I think it's going to be a good week and are you coming?" And I said, "I have not planned." So he said, "I would really like for you to come." When I didn't say anything and then he says, "We really would like for you to come because you are the 2009 World Food Prize winner." [Laughs] So I had not expected it so I was stunned.

KM: That's wonderful.

GE: Yeah.

KM: Do you have any idea…do you think that you would have been nominated…sometimes people say that…I've talked to people where they've sort of…there have been but they didn't get…it depends…depending on the prize or something or some special award.

GE: Yeah that was exactly what happened with me. I think I was nominated 2004 and…

KM: Did you happen to find that out by serendipity or…

GE: No when they do something then they have to have information, a lot of information. I know and they don't and so somehow finally…

KM: They need to touch base.

GE: They needed to touch base and so but then the nomination is good only for three years and so when 2007 was over, I said it was over. And by then I had already

gone on a sabbatical leave and worked in Africa and when I came back I thought it was over and not only that but meanwhile there was a Purdue person that won in 2007 and I said that there's just no way they would give it to another Purdue person. [Laughs]

KM: [Laughs] You never know.

GE: You never know.

KM: Might give you a Kennedy half-dollar. Who knows right?

GE: So that, that was why I wasn't even suspecting that he may be calling me but…

KM: And that was a very nice thing. And you had a special ceremonies and people came from…was your mother able to come?

GE: No, no unfortunately.

KM: But you have seen her? You've been back?

GE: Yes. The World Food Prize Foundation sent me back with a photographer and to get some footage for the program they put together.

KM: Oh, before you got the award.

GE: That's right. They sent me there and so I went to my village, the high school that I went to, the college I went to and so that we had testimonials from people, side pictures and so on.

KM: What did your mother say?

GE: She couldn't understand. She couldn't understand and so she's generally…

KM: Is your father still alive or…

GE: No. My father is gone. So my mother understood that something good had happened but she has no…

KM: But she knew you were coming?

GE: Yes. She still recognizes me.

KM: And that picture's nice of her, with the two of you sort of in the background. I think it's a great shot. Of course then afterwards you have the media and then
35:00 you have the day here at Purdue, which was nice.

GE: Yes, you know someone said your life is never the same after that and I think to a great extent, that is true. There is so much demand on your time. A lot of good things have happened in terms of people congratulating me and so on. I've received over 2500 emails from around the world. Notes from people that I never knew that were touched by the work.

KM: And what it meant to the people.

GE: That's right.

KM: That's really key and they realize that.

GE: They realize that and I got that. But then on the other hand the big that as far as I'm concerned that this did is not only the personal recognition but the platform

that it has been and is going to be in terms of the creditability speaking on behalf of the poor, on behalf of the science.

KM: The international.

GE: Right, and so that has been very significant. I've had a lot of demand on that too. Go around the world and speak until now and until next September for example. I have twenty-eight invitations to go around and speak.

KM: One of the things I read was that with the prize that you got, you're going to set up a foundation for educational… which is very nice.

GE: Well that's what we're working on but…

KM: It's a good thought. And really it would mean things go on long after you're gone.

GE: My family and I have decided that we have enough and fortunately, for us, our children have attended college…

KM: Do you think some would come to Purdue?

GE: Yes, a couple of them attended Purdue and somewhere else and so today we're okay. And so my children appreciate the fact they've been given great opportunity because of the opportunities that I had in the early days and so they realize that there are many more that don't have the opportunity that I had and they would like to help and my children have good jobs and have good network and linkages and they said if we have a foundation there would be many that

would contribute to the foundation and so initially we're thinking of creating the same kind of boarding school that I attend that gave me that opportunity.

KM: Very nice. It's needed.

GE: Yes. Badly needed and so we will see how it would go.

KM: It's a good thought and it's a good plan. The other nice thing is that you got the Nelson Innovation Prize that he governor set up and you got it. This is wonderful. Ironic you know?

GE: Yeah it's ironic the fact that…

KM: He probably didn't make any comment or…he has kind of a sense of humor from what I understand and well I named it and I'm giving it to another Purdue person as well.

GE: No, he didn't say and I was surprised myself that he would do that. I think that award was originally established to encourage younger people from the state of Indiana and I think…

KM: It's a nice award.

GE: It's a nice award; I hope he would do that in the future. But it was…

KM: Right, I want to talk a little about some of the mentoring. You talked about Dr. Axtell and thereabout there was another one and I remember Dr. Butler because I did some literature searches and I knew Professor Axtell because years ago we got some things from the USDA and there was money for a literature searches

and so I did some for him and we kind of got to know each other and occasionally I'd run into him at Schmidty's and he always spoke and so I sort of knew him and you mentor students as well and so it works both ways.

GE: That's right. I have been very fortunate to have had some really great mentors. Certainly John Axtell and because he literally picked me from Africa and brought me here and then he was a great mentor, he encouraged me and sewed into me very early on some attributes that he thought had soon potential and these were attributes that I didn't even know that I had and so he…

KM: He realized that.

40:00 **GE:** He nurtured that in me and encouraged me and so I'm very grateful. There are several others.

KM: One is your faculty member at college.

GE: That's right. He was a guy who directed me to study plant sciences, plant genetics. He had just returned from university education from the University of Minnesota and had heard about the Nobel Prize that Norm Borlaug had won. And so he said, "You can do a lot with a degree in genetics" and ironically it's kind of happened the way he projected. And so I give him a lot of credit and take more than the fact that I won the World Food Prize, the fact that the education that you can do, you can serve humanity with the opportunities through plant genetics which was very important and then when I finished college, the graduate

school the person who was my supervisor was another Purdue graduate, a fellow by the name Lee House and he was a great mentor.

KM: That's "don't lose the forest for the trees?"

GE: That's right. He was the one that he said someone else who hired him and told him that you know don't lose the forest for the trees.

KM: I didn't even realize he was a Purdue grad.

GE: He was a graduate from here, masters in biochemistry and PhD in genetics. So I worked for him and then a person who was very well known in the community here was the director of international programs, Woods Thomas.

KM: Right. I remember him.

GE: Woods was a great mentor.

KM: Super guy.

GE: Yes and he was committed to…

KM: We had lots of contact because of international.

GE: He was committed to international development and early on he engaged me and he sought my inputs and encouraged me and got me involved and I'm very grateful or him as well. So in return, about the only way I can pay back for these people is to try to reproduce or replicate their vision on encouraging younger people and I've been very fortunate to have worked with a lot of young people over the years and many of them now are engaged in the kind of things that I do.

KM: And you teach that course in one of the graduate courses, which is nice.

GE: That's right. I teach a graduate level course in principals and methods of plant breeding and I've also taught seminars here in the past and so this is in the area of research that I do and so I can relate to it well enough and I can impart that.

KM: The good combination, mentoring and teaching.

GE: That's right, the passion that…

KM: Which is good.

GE: The passion that I have for all of these things.

KM: Couple of…then you got your associations…do you still keep active in the crop science and seed professional associations?

GE: I am still a member. I'm not as active as I used to be.

KM: And you're a fellow of the American Advancement right?

GE: That's right I've been a fellow of…

KM: What about that science council that consulting group on international group on agriculture research, are you still involved with that?

GE: Yes, I'm still a member of the science council. This is an advisory board of about seven people that provide advice to fifteen agriculture research centers on science quality, and science relevance, and science impact. And so it's a body that you serve for about three years and renewable for another three and it's a

wonderful opportunity because these fifteen centers serve the entire globe in agriculture research directed to developing countries and to be able…

KM: To good contact…good association for you?

GE: Yeah to offer that has been very good.

KM: One of the other things that I read…maybe a dialogue between you and your friend the faculty member who at your university, a seminar series of some sort.

GE: Right, when I went back, I went back a month after the World Food Prize, the government of Ethiopia invited me to come back.

KM: And you got an award from them.

GE: That's right and the president of the country gave me the highest medal, medal of honor that they would give to any of their citizens even though I'm no more a citizen there they expressed…

KM: On behalf of…

GE: Yes, they expressed their pride by giving me that and I was able to meet with the
45:00 president and the prime minister. And then we held a dialogue on agriculture development in Ethiopia and Africa and hundreds of people gathered for that. I was the keynote speaker there. Other people spoke including my old mentor from college. And so we want to be holding that annual dialogue and I have suggested that be named after my mentor from college.

KM: Very nice. That's very nice.

GE: [Agrees]

KM: And a self-perpetuating kind of thing, which is good.

GE: That's right, that's right.

KM: I'm going to leave it and let you make some closing comments or something I didn't ask that you'd like to add or topic that I may have missed on.

GE: No, I think we've covered a lot of ground with this…

KM: And you're looking ahead?

GE: Yeah and just in passing for the younger generation in particular is what has been very important for me is to want to be as good as I could be in my career, in my profession, in the science that I do. That is very important to be the best scientist that you can be, in whatever field you are. And as I tell my children but also at the same time it is good to sustain and maintain this element of service in your background. I think if we would think beyond our self-gratification to provide service and assistance to something better than ourselves. At the end of the day you know when you have gone through your career and so on, invariability I'm sure you would ask yourself how have I made the world a better a place and what have I contributed. To be able to say that is just a wonderful…

KM: It's a great thing. And it means so much and it's very fulfilling, self-fulfilling which is very nice.

GE: Yes. And as John Axtell, my mentor, would say, “You know it’s all about people.” And so if in the process you impart that passion to others and you give them a hand and every step of the way, it’s not only what you do collectively what you would all do and serving humanity, and serving society it’s a wonderful…

KM: That’s also serving yourself at the same time by doing that.

GE: That’s right.

KM: And that’s really key. Thank you very much.

GE: You’re welcome. Thank you.

KM: Thank you, my pleasure.

End of Interview

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*Proper names may be spelled incorrectly