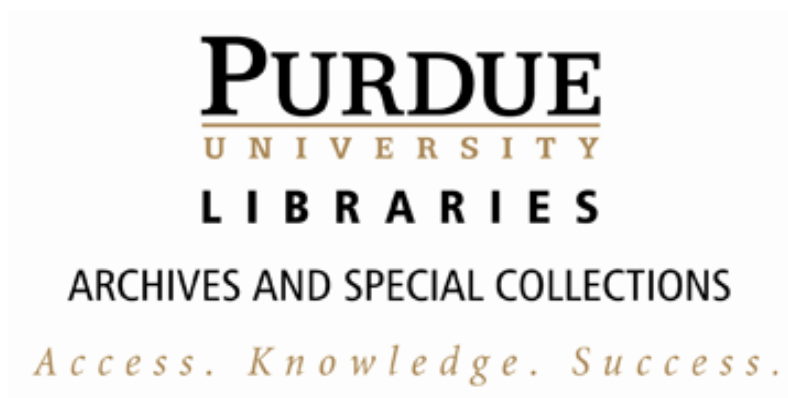


Thomas P. Adler Interview

Conducted by Katherine Markee on July 16, 2010



The following interview was conducted with Thomas P. Adler (TA), Professor Emeritus of English, for the Purdue University Oral History Program. It took place on Friday July 16, 2010 in Stewart Center. The interviewer is Katherine Markee (KM), the Oral History Librarian.

KM: Good afternoon Professor Adler. Thank you very much.

TA: I'm happy to be here.

KM: Tell me a little bit about where you were born and early years growing up.

TA: I was born in Cleveland, Ohio. I was supposed to be born on Christmas Day but I was finally born on January 3, 1943 so I was a war baby. I still have my ration book to prove that with the stamps in it. My mother was from a suburb on the west side, Avon, a small suburb and my father was from Cleveland Heights. He was a lingerie salesman and she was actually working in a women's apparel store in Elyria and that's how they met. She had never gone beyond eighth grade, I think maybe she went to business school for a year and my father graduated from Shaw High School. I went to parochial school, we lived in Cleveland Heights when I was born and in Lyndhurst and I was always a reader. I remember going to the library often, I remember also going to the movies every Saturday afternoon. We lived near the Richmond Theater and I would go there on my own and for ten cents you would see your double feature and your serials and your cartoons and so forth. And I remember when I finally taught short fiction on film I used *Bad Day at Black Rock*, a Spencer Tracy film and that actually I think was the first really adult film that I saw and I must have seen it about ten years old I was going to these things on my own. But we had gone to a lot of movies. We had gone to the Andrews Sisters and the Disney cartoons and so

forth. I usually on Sunday afternoons went to the Colony Theater and I always liked going downtown in Cleveland, I'm a big city boy.

KM: Good. Tell us about high school?

TA: I went to high school at St. Joseph's High School which at the time was a very large Catholic boy's school, about 2,000 students. I had really good English teachers though at that time I didn't know that I'd go on in English but I remember learning a lot of grammar from our Latin teacher who was also our first year English teacher. Probably more grammar in the Latin course than in the English course and he had us write every week. And I developed a real facility for writing and writing usually, you know, without a lot of rewriting. When I was there I edited the high school newspaper. We won a big award at the St. Bonaventure University in New York. We also had a literary magazine we inserted into the high school paper. Went to a lot of so-called art films at the time at the theater in Cleveland Heights.

KM: The feature films.

TA: The foreign films that were coming in and also went to a lot of musicals. There was a lot of summer theater in Cleveland and so forth.

KM: Like Blossom Center?

TA: Yeah. Well Blossom Center wasn't actually there then but the Musicarnival...

KM: Cain Park.

TA: Cain Park and Musicarnival and the Cleveland Pops played downtown at the time in a public auditorium. But also when I was in high school the great big Shakespeare festival was there getting ready to move up to the 1964 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and they actually, over a period of years, did the entire canon of Shakespeare and I saw a great many of those in the summers.

KM: Sure.

TA: They performed in a high school auditorium in Lakewood. I took, both later in my elementary years and my high school years, I took art lessons at the Art Museum and the Cleveland Institute, especially in the summers. So I always had an interest in art.

KM: Sure. That's a good facility. Then after high school what happened?

TA: For my undergraduate degree I went to Boston College.

KM: How did you happen to select that? That's far from home.

TA: Far from home and I wanted to go East and so it was Boston College or Fordham or Georgetown and I finally selected Boston College I think because there was a neighbor who went there. I mean I wasn't Jesuit educated in high school, Ignatius of course was on the Westside, and not too many people from our side of town went across town to Ignatius. When I went to Boston College it was a fairly small, at least the liberal arts college, was fairly small at the time. I think about 1,200 and all men in liberal arts although there were women in education and in nursing

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and so forth. The class before mine had admitted, on an experimental basis, seven women. And they found that they simply could not put them into classes with the men and the finally tutored them throughout their four years and they were called the seven wonders like the seven sister colleges or something.

KM: Sure, exactly.

TA: But Boston College people thought I had come from, when you said you were from Ohio, they thought you had come from west of the Mississippi. I mean that was really far away because most of the students in liberal arts or sciences were actually commuters. There were dorms, a lot of dorms, but most of the dorm students were from New York or Connecticut, that area. I think there were three of us from Cleveland and a couple of those from Ashtabula. [laughter] A small contingent from Ohio at the time.

KM: Sure, right.

TA: Though it was interesting when I taught here at Purdue how many Boston College alums I had in my graduate classes eventually because finally Boston College became co-ed and it's now a major urban university. But the English department there was very, very good. Wonderful teachers and probably the ones that I modeled my own teaching on. They tended either to have gotten their Ph.D.s from University of Chicago so some Neo-Aristotelians or the University of Wisconsin where there were very famous professors like White and Quintana were there. And in fact when I came here to Purdue to the English department one of the faculty members, Andy DeVitis...I don't know if...

KM: I remember him.

TA: At the time he had been with a lot of my teachers at Boston College, they had done their graduate work at Wisconsin. Edward Nels who was an expert in D.H. Lawrence and who taught the modern drama course which was my first real introduction to dramatic literature but I had really excellent teachers. P. Albert Duhamel for Shakespeare and Richard Hughes for metaphysical poets, I mean they were really terrific. Leonard Cast for contemporary American fiction and I didn't know that I was going to go onto English for graduate work, I was thinking of going on in American studies because at Boston College a lot of the history I took was intellectual history, both European and then American history. And so I wasn't sure that I would go on but I did stay there for my master's. I had been literary editor of the yearbook and at graduation was awarded what they called the Brick Award, the Gold Brick Award was the nickname and given to an all around outstanding senior. And all the other awards came with watches or checks but this was supposed to be so prestigious all you got was a little gold key but nothing very tangible or substantial. [laughter] Just the honor.

KM: The key to your heart or whatever.

TA: Like an early Phi Beta Kappa key. We didn't have Phi Beta Kappa at Boston College, the library was too small at the time. So I was really pleased finally to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa as an honorary member here at Purdue in '95...

KM: When the chapter finally got going.

TA: When the chapter got going I became a member of Phi Beta Kappa here because Boston College at the time, now they have a chapter, but at the time their library...though their library had a tremendous collection of Irish literature and is still well known in Irish studies of course.

KM: Sure. Were there many lay teachers there or priests?

TA: Yes. All of us really as undergrads minored in theology and philosophy because we had so much theology and philosophy.

KM: You had to take it.

TA: We had to take it so I took like seven or eight philosophy courses and including one taught by the only woman professor I had in the College of Arts and Sciences, Idela Gallagher. She and her husband were very well known in the Catholic Philosophical Association and she taught contemporary philosophy which I took from her. But there were very few priests teaching in the English Department, it was almost all lay faculty. I had a priest for freshmen English but after that it was all lay faculty actually and not all Catholic either. They had hired very, very widely so but Edward Nels like I mentioned was not Catholic so they were hiring very, very widely and it was a really superb department. They had a master's program and I stayed on for the master's. When I went for the master's I really did my work in the novel. I wrote a master's thesis on E.M. Forster and when I was getting my master's I was a teaching fellow and I taught in the School of Nursing. So the first two years that I taught I taught all women, there were no men going to nursing school back in 1964 so I had all very, very bright young

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women, many of whom had gone to eastern boarding schools and so forth. And also we had a number of women who had associate degrees, including a number of nuns who had three year degrees that were coming back for the diploma, the four year degree so they could become administrators and teachers. So when I was teaching I had women twice my age in my class but I think we had a good time. They enjoyed it because literature for them of course was a break from the science and so forth and so on.

KM: They needed that. [laughter] Sure.

TA: So at the time I taught Benedetto Croce, the very famous Italian art philosopher, his granddaughter was in my class. I taught women who would become dean of the School of Nursing and really very, very good students.

KM: Well you're talking about the background of some of these students. If they've gone to the boarding schools and prep schools and primary whatever then I know the mix. Right.

TA: And it was fine. A few months into my teaching Dean Cannon, who just died recently at 101 or something like that she was dean of the nursing school for years and years, I remember called me in and asked me if things were going OK and if I was having any problem teaching all of these women you know and I said no, it doesn't bother me at all. I said we're doing fine. The other person who was teaching the freshmen nursing student's literature was Father Frances X. Sweenly who was the person who ran the humanities program at Boston College, he brought in all the lecturers and he knew the famous writers. So when

I was an undergrad we saw Robert Frost, we saw T.S. Eliot, Robert Penn Warren, just everybody came.

KM: Well in those days it was easily to get these people to come.

TA: Katherine Anne Porter I remember came in and gave her reading in this black satin gown with this orange satin stole.

KM: She had a presence.

TA: A wonderful presence.

KM: Right, she did.

TA: And I was active in the Undergrad English Association and we used to bring in poets, readers that we introduce like X.J. Kennedy and May Swenson and so you know we met a lot of writers through this man that knew all these people.

KM: Just enriched the whole college.

TA: Yeah and of course when you're in Boston a lot of writers come through the area or lived in the area and so forth. So I stayed there for my master's, I probably would have stayed on for my Ph.D. but that's not advised that you go to the same college for all three degrees or university but they didn't have a Ph.D. program for English at the time. They instituted it shortly after I left there and so I came back to the Midwest but further west than had been and went to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana which was the smallest town I had ever lived in up to that point.

KM: Were you married by that time?

TA: No I actually met my wife at Illinois. She was a student in library science there and we met in a dorm cafeteria.

KM: Sharing lunch or something?

TA: Sharing lunch or dinner. We got to know a group of people, well we were really in all fields, I don't know how the group sort of formed but it did. Some of us in English, some in library. I think it formed because a person who became a good friend of mine had been there the summer before and he got to know librarians who went to school in the summer as well.

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KM: Sure, sure.

TA: And then I sort of met him but we had a real group of people by the time we finished the year and there were a few marriages that resulted from the group in this way.

KM: Interesting. That's very nice.

TA: So that's where we met and she was an Illinois farm girl.

KM: Did she get a library degree there?

TA: Got a library degree there and we were engaged and she went on and worked a year as a children's librarian in Chicago. She had one of those Illinois grants where afterwards you have to teach two years or work for two years in an Illinois library. And so she worked for a year in Chicago as a children's librarian at one of

the branches and then when we were married she came down and worked as a children's librarian in the Champaign Public Library. I was there for four years doing course work in prelims and...

KM: Were you doing teaching while you were there?

TA: I taught. The whole four years I taught though the last year I taught full time. I taught advanced composition at first and then I taught introduction to drama and introduction to poetry. It wasn't as we tell our graduate students how sort of easy they have it now. I mean at that time you actually wrote prelims in five areas and so you wrote in a number of areas where you had no coursework and so you worked all of this up on your own.

KM: And you had to meet the language requirements.

TA: You had to read two foreign languages, I did French and German, though I must admit I never really used them in my research but that was the requirement at the time and you did Old English as well.

KM: Latin was not one of the languages you learned?

TA: No it wasn't.

KM: Although we're very well versed in that.

TA: I had taken four years of Latin in high school.

KM: And we knew all the songs in Latin, we memorized them.

TA: Yeah. Though I had not gone on in Latin in college. I had taken a couple years of French in college. I did my work at Illinois mostly in Victorian literature which I somehow escaped or slighted in my earlier studies. In fact my first publication actually grew out of a paper I did in Victorian literature course for Donald Smalley who was a fairly well known person in Browning studies. I did a paper on Tennyson and Milton that was finally published but I did my work mainly in dramatic literature. In drama as a genre I studied under, well my director was Alan Holaday who edited the Chapman plays, but I also studied under Glen Evans who went on to edit the Riverside Shakespeare which became one of the standard Shakespearian texts. By the time I left there he had left for Harvard, he had been called back to Harvard, you know Harvard really hired its own as full professors. They go back but now it might be different than then. He was called back to Harvard in the middle of editing the Riverside Shakespeare. I'll never forget he was an interesting person but a little bit absent-minded, I mean a little bit of the stereotype. One day he came in and I was taking him for non-dramatic Shakespearian literature and he came in and started teaching a totally different course that he just thought we were so we had to stop him and say this is not this class you know it's some other class. [laughter]

KM: Those are the ones we remember right? They stick in our minds.

TA: And Illinois was a very highly rated department at the time, maybe 5th or 6th in the nation. Some of those people had left for other places but Barker was there in Milton, and Smalley in Victorian, and Evans in Shakespeare.

KM: A good group there.

TA: A good group of people but again mainly it's surprising even for the time how few women professors I had when I was in college. And really none, except for the language studies, were at Illinois. There were women there, they were beginning to hire more women but it was a fairly male-dominated profession at the time.

KM: Sure. How did you like Champaign-Urbana?

TA: Yeah I lived in the graduate dorm for a couple of years and then we lived in an apartment when we were married of course. And while we were there the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts opened.

KM: Oh wow.

20:00 **TA:** And I had done...you could minor when you were getting a Ph.D. in English and I think I was the only person who minored in theater history so I got to know some of the professors and some of the students who went on to important careers in acting.

KM: Yeah, it's a nice combination.

TA: But while I was there the Krannert Center opened for the performing arts and I did the reviewing for the local paper, I reviewed the theater productions for a couple of years with the local paper.

KM: The local Champaign paper?

TA: For the Champaign paper yeah. I had done some book reviews before that for papers but never theater reviewing.

KM: That means you have to go to the performances.

TA: Go to the performances and I did the local...so I reviewed both the professional things that came in the equivalent of Convocations brought in and also the university things I reviewed.

KM: Yeah. Well that was a nice job.

TA: In Champaign it was a small town for me. You could go for Chicago on the train and take the milk train back, you know go up for one day and take the train back which I would do occasionally when Winnie was working up there.

KM: Sure.

TA: But it was different to be in such a small...

KM: Quite a change from Boston, yeah.

TA: And from Cleveland even. When I grew up Cleveland, I mean this was way before the Cuyahoga River caught fire and I mean downtown was a wonderful place to go.

KM: Right. It's where the Rockefellers got started and Euclid Avenue was the house where Frances Payne Bolton grew up.

TA: I know. The area around the art museum there in Severance Hall and remember the Epworth Methodist Church that had the copper tower that looked like an

upside down oil can because of all of the oil money that was there and so it was really...

KM: Right.

TA: So Champaign for me was really quite a very small town. I had really good students from the Chicago suburbs in my classes. You know when you have a large urban area around Chicago, those high schools northeast of Chicago turned out really good students so I had some really terrific students in my classes. And you develop friends among your fellow teaching assistants and so forth.

KM: Right.

TA: But it was really intense work as well to get finished in that length of time. There were very few people who started with me who finished...I think only one who finished in four years like I did and it was a good thing we did because we entered the profession just when jobs were getting scarce. So another couple of years and it was getting harder and harder to get academic positions.

KM: Is that when you came to Purdue?

TA: I came to Purdue. I spent my entire professional career at Purdue after my Ph.D. It's sort of interesting at that time...

KM: You finished and you came here in 1970.

TA: In 1970, yeah. At that time departments didn't advertise position openings like they do now. There was no such thing like the MLA job list and so you just wrote

these letters. You got the names of the chairs at various departments and you wrote and told them about yourself and said if you have an opening in my area you'd like to be considered. I considered my area dramatic literature but mainly medieval, Tudor, and Elizabethan since I had written under somebody in Elizabethan literature. At the time when I wrote to Purdue I just wrote a dear sir letter because they had had a new head and I didn't know the person's name. If I had known the person's name I probably would have never written because it was Jacob Adler. And so I probably wouldn't have written to a Professor Adler as an Adler to ask for a job. But it turned out that...

KM: Are you sure you don't want genealogy?

TA: He interviewed me and this was his first year. He did very extensive hiring in lots of areas and I was the person he brought in modern drama especially. He taught modern drama in fact along with 18th century but there was a large cadre of people who had been in drama studies here at Purdue. You know some fairly well known people like Richard Cordell and Al Fulton who also started the first film course in the Midwest back in 1948. So I came mainly to teach drama and I did teach both at the grad and undergrad level, I did teach the medieval, the Tudor, the Elizabethan, the Shakespearian but I found myself teaching more and more the modern British and the modern America, especially the modern America.

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KM: Uh-huh. That is what you did with your research.

TA: And so almost all my research, except for a couple of early papers in Victorian poetry and Elizabethan poetry, was in modern American and modern British. From when I came here there were six of us in English teaching modern drama courses and by the time I retired I was the lone person and now there will probably not be another person hired specifically for dramatic literature.

KM: Tennessee Williams was one of your...

TA: Yeah Tennessee Williams was really my major research interest. In fact I was on the committee when Williams came here in the spring of '72 for literary awards. And I actually got to...

KM: It was a coup to get him.

TA: Yeah well I wasn't chair of the committee, Margaret Church was chair of the committee who became one of my real favorites among the professors in English.

KM: Nice person.

TA: I mean again she was the only woman full professor at the time in English.

KM: I imagine.

TA: She was a Radcliffe Harvard Ph.D. and had taught at Duke and then came here and I imagine she had a fairly rough time among all those men on the primary committee but you know. But she was chair of the committee but she turned over to me sort of taking care of Williams.

KM: Oh how great.

TA: For a couple days I mean. I drove down to Indianapolis to meet him at the airport with Gene Kidahl who was in theater, he went down with me. And Williams arrived with his secretary, he had a secretary with him, a man traveling with him, and then he brought along a brother-sister acting team, Alfred Ryder and Olive Dearing. Ryder was the redheaded man who was in a lot of the Mission Impossible shows, the villain usually in the Mission Impossible shows. I mean Tennessee did like to have a drink so while we were waiting for Olive and Alfred to arrive we of course went to the bar and then they arrived and we were sitting there having a drink and this man got off the bar stool and came over to our table and he said I really have to introduce myself and meet you. And of course I thought he was going to meet Tennessee Williams. No, he knew Alfred Ryder from Mission Impossible, he didn't know Tennessee Williams at all. [laughter] He knew Alfred Ryder.

KM: Well God forbid. [laughter]

TA: And then we drove up to Lafayette and Tennessee said I really need to stop at the liquor store before I get to the hotel. And it was about midnight and I stopped, there was a liquor store next to Sarge Bilt's there on 52 and we just made it. And he went in and bought a few bottles and then we when we checked in at the...

KM: Did you stay at the Union?

TA: At the Union. He had his paper bag full of bottles, I don't think there was much liquor in the Union at the time, I'm sure people did bring it in their suitcases and

so forth but he signed the guest book and then...you know I did things like take him swimming at the Co-Rec because he swam every day and I took him out to buy kaopectate and I took him to lunch but you know he was really easy to get along with. People have this impression that these people are temperamental and difficult. He was not difficult at all and when I met these people, and I met a lot of people over the years, I never really tried to pump them for anything that would help me with my writing or anything. And I think that helps if they think they're out there to try to use them or get something from them but I never did that.

KM: They get the message real quick.

TA: Yeah so I never did that. I mean he autographed a paperback for me but we didn't do that kind of thing and I didn't...

KM: You just hosted him.

TA: Yeah didn't bring him to class or anything like that. I didn't put any demands on him at all, I just spent time with him. Before the Literary Awards Banquet the Hansons, Art and Nancy, gave a party at Westwood and I reminded when I went to Art Hanson's memorial visitation the other day I saw Paul, the son, and I said the first time I really met your dad was when he hosted the party for Tennessee Williams, he and Nancy had the party at Westwood. They were the first president who lived in Westwood, when I came it was the last year of Fred Hovde who had done the welcome and then Art Hanson was in. And in fact for the longest time in my office in English until I retired I actually had a wingback chair and ottoman

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that had been in the Hanson's living room in Westwood. When the Hansons left the furniture went to salvage and Allen Hayman came and bought this in salvage and passed it on to me. And then I passed it on to a graduate student, I said this chair was actually in the president's house at Purdue. [laughter] And when I had it in my office in English it was occupied by some very important people who had come for Literary Awards like Seamus Heany sat in it for a while before he went over and so forth but I had the chair and the ottoman for a long, long time. And then Tennessee went to the banquet and they brought their liquor in the bag...when they found out there would be no wine at dinner in the Union, you know you can't have a meal without wine, the food was not really very good back then in the Union.

KM: They can do it if they want to and they can't.

TA: Now they can really do it much better but back in those days the roast beef was not really very tender and so forth but they sat up there at the head table and take out the bottle of wine and bottle of liquor and pour some in their glass and no one said anything to them.

KM: We didn't see anything.

TA: And I was charged by the department to bring Tennessee afterwards to a faculty party so the faculty could meet him but some graduate students in theater got to him after the banquet and invited him to a student party in a sort of run-down house here in West Lafayette and then to a place in Lafayette and I couldn't get him away. So here I was untenured, I have to go to the faculty party and say I'm

sorry you're not going to meet Tennessee Williams because I can't get him away from the students and so I had failed to bring him to my colleagues. So I was on the Literary Awards Committee , the following year it was my turn to chair Literary Awards and I chaired it later on also, I brought in Stephen Spender one year, I brought in Edward Albee who was actually wonderful, terrific with the students and I had met Albee a number of times before that. But the year after Williams I brought in Anthony Burgess and I had lined him up and so forth and everything was announced, the tickets were sold, and all the publicity was out and his agent called me a few days before the banquet and said Mr. Burgess won't come. And I said you can't do this, I said this would be a terrible thing if he didn't come and he said well he's in Boston and there was a tryout of a musical that he had written, based on Cyrano de Bergerac. I don't think it was really successful ever and they offered me, in place of Burgess, the agent offered me the Watergate burglars and the Watergate people. I could have John Dean or I could have [inaudible], as if we want these people you know. [laughter] So I said Burgess just simply got to come so I called Burgess's house and talked to his Portuguese housekeeper and told her why I was calling and she told me how to get in touch with him in Boston and he indeed came but didn't stay very long. He flew in, we picked him up at the airport or maybe Andy DeVitas who wrote a book on him picked him up, we brought him out, he gave the talk, a wonderful talk that Art Hanson and I remember. And Art's first provost, I don't remember what he was called back then but Cotton Robinson who sat next to my wife at the...back then there was always a head table for the Literary Awards and I remember Cotton Robinson sat

next to my wife and told her risqué jokes during the dinner. But Burgess gave a wonderful talk, everybody loved him but then he just left as soon as he had done that but he sort of saved me because people would have been furious if I had brought the Watergate people. [laughter]

KM: Gene [inaudible] whatever.

TA: Which I wouldn't have done but you know Literary Awards is very prestigious. We've had some of the world's most famous writers there you know and...

KM: They have a different story to tell. [laughter]

TA: Yeah and so he did come and he left a lit cigar in our bedroom and so it burned a hole in something in our bedroom when he changed clothes up there or something you know. [laughter]

KM: Whatever, whatever.

TA: So you know over the years there were just wonderful writers who came to Literary Awards.

KM: Right. Let's talk a little bit about some of your administrative things. You were the assistant head?

TA: I was assistant head of English. It was sort of funny to have Adler and Adler, it was like hanging out a law firm sign, you know Adler and Adler, head and assistant head. And you know people would call and you would have to say which one do you want when people would call and ask for Professor Adler.

35:00

KM: Sure.

TA: And mainly your duties back then were scheduling faculty courses, class schedules, deciding which courses would be taught and who would teach them, you know trying to accommodate people's wants and needs and so forth involving faculty recruitment. You ran the department picnic which my own children always hated because it meant a hot Sunday in August or September all day working because at that time you just did everything for the department picnic.

KM: [laughter] We could write a book on just that.

TA: Yeah but the English department back in the 1970s when I came there was a very distinct culture among faculty members. I don't know if the English department was different from other departments or not but there was a lot of socializing...

KM: Did you meet the Braswells ?

TA: Oh yeah. The Braswells, the Ersingers, the Crowders, the Kottlers, lots and lots of socializing.

KM: Among the...

TA: Among the faculty.

KM: Right.

TA: And a lot of the wives knew one another because most of the wives were not working and there were lots of cocktail parties and lots of Sunday night suppers and you were expected to reciprocate. You were invited and then they expected to be invited despite the fact that you might have a couple of babies under two years old in your house you were still expected to get dinner and entertain and so forth and we did it.

KM: That's true. Nell Braswell was always having parties.

TA: Oh yeah always having parties and Nell was a lot of fun. And Nell was from Demopolis, Georgia I remember and...

KM: He'd come from Duke, hadn't he?

TA: Yeah. Yeah a number of faculty from our department came from Duke actually. Margaret Church, Rick Reichard*, Hugo Reichard, Bill Keirce come from Duke and later on with that group that I came with, Clayton Lean was from Duke, and then when I was head later on I hired two people from Duke so Duke has supplied us with a good number of people.

KM: Yeah, well their school has been going for a long time and is different from here. The grad school, do you want to make any comments?

TA: Yeah. Then after that though I kept teaching and writing all while I was doing this I became an associate dean of the graduate school that was I think mainly happenstance. I was on the faculty University Senate and sitting next to me was Struther Arnott because of alphabetical order, Adler-Arnott. I had never met this

man before and got to know him a little bit and he needed somebody who was an associate dean, was leaving, and he needed an associate dean and asked me if I would come in. Check with my dean to see if this would be OK and brought me into the graduate school where I was in charge of fellowships at the beginning. And then as I became senior associate dean I just sort of did a lot of things including filling in between Struther's term and Bob Ringel's term.

KM: Did they have as many associates as now?

TA: Not as many as associate deans. We were assigned certain areas for curriculum development and...

KM: Right, OK. And liaisoned.

TA: And liaisoned but I did a lot of...at the time Steve Byrn was with me in the office. Steve and I had been at Illinois together. We didn't know each other at Illinois, we both demonstrated against DOW Chemical at Illinois because this was the Vietnam years. In fact, the day that I defended my dissertation, at that time dissertation defenses were public and a calendar was published and so forth, the day that I defended the university was shut down for a student strike. And my director insisted, since the date and time had been published, that the defense goes on and so it was at his house. And so nobody came except the members of the committee so I'm not sure that my degree was actually legal or legitimate but I mean I never told anybody about that. [laughter]

KM: Whatever. You spoke anyway.

TA: But anyway we had marched, we'd been activists at the time and Steve I know told me later that I didn't know him when he was there but we were together in the grad school and Jane Kahle who was interested in women in science and was in the graduate school at the time. At that time the dean was both...

KM: And research as well.

40:00 **TA:** The dean of the graduate school and head of research so there you gave out, well they were called David Ross grants back then, you administered those, you administered fellowships, you administered just lots of things. In fact, one time it said in *The Exponent*, when it used to list grants, that I had been awarded four million dollars by the National Science Foundation. Well my name was on the National Science Foundation grants for graduate students coming in, you know that kind of thing.

KM: You were the disperser.

TA: Yeah. Finally I did just about everything in the graduate school and I stayed on for four years because as I said Bob Ringel came in.

KM: And he carried the same thing. He was also the bestower of research at the school.

TA: Yes and then that interim period of course I worked with Bob Greencorn who was head of vice president for research or worked in that office anyway, I think became that after Struther left, I'm not sure. The thing about working in the

graduate school was that was the time that I really got to know people all over the campus.

KM: Right, right.

TA: Because before that you knew people in English and you knew people in your own college mainly. And you'd meet people occasionally outside, mainly when your children had friends and their parents, but by being in the graduate school I just got to know people all over the campus because I was calling them and working with them on various things.

KM: Right, exactly.

TA: Then I became Associate Dean of Liberal Arts. You know I never thought when I went into English that I'd ever be an administrator. You know I thought I would be just a professor and researcher or writer and it turned out that I did finally about 21 years of administration either full or half-time. And the graduate school jobs started out half-time and as I was filling in it would become full-time and so forth. But then I became Associate Dean of Liberal Arts under David Caputo and...

KM: Right because the school had been split by that time. '89.

TA: Well actually we managed the divide of the College of Education and I chaired the committee that renamed it as the School of Liberal Arts when Education left. And the other major thing that I did, along with filling in for David...David was very active in his own research, election politics and election monitoring and so forth and so on. So I did a lot of filling in for him over the years but the main thing

I did was to chair what became known as the Curriculum 2000 Committee where we redid the core curriculum. And we put in to place a really very comprehensive curriculum that required a great deal of diversity. The students had to take courses in gender and ethnicity and non-Western cultures and so forth and so on. They had to do a lab course, they had to do just a lot of things that had not been required before in an attempt to make the curriculum such that they would be introduced to a wide range of subject matter and really it was the years when people were trying to put in these curricula that would just make sure that people had taken some introductory work in these areas, particularly of race and ethnicity and gender. And it was a hard sell, I mean it was...

KM: They're never easy.

TA: No and it was a difficult sell because it meant that as the core grew that people had to take things out of the major or take things out of the minor. And I went around to every department and sort of sold it to the departments. I remember one person I knew in psychology said to me, he said I wouldn't do what you have to do if they paid me the world. He said just stand up there and get all that criticism and that and you know it passed finally; it passed by a substantial margin.

KM: You need a lot of that. A lot of that is one on one.

TA: Yeah one on one. You've got to talk to people and you just have to...we got great support. We had one student member of the committee who really was very, very proactive in wanting these kind of diversity courses.

KM: I don't think in those days Tom that many of the committees did not have student representation.

TA: Yeah that was something that David Caputo did insist on. We had student representation...

45:00 **KM:** Now even on the search committee.

TA: Yeah the search committees. When I first came the search committees would not, well there weren't really search committees, the head and the assistant head sort of did it themselves.

KM: Sure.

TA: But yeah I was here over the years when they begin to add graduate students and undergraduate students to search committees. And I had and maybe continue to have some problems with that because the thing that worried me always about that was confidentiality. Because these graduate students are going to see letters of recommendation about people who may in turn become their professors and I was always concerned about the fact that things that should not be known outside of the committee would be spread among graduate students. That was my major concern.

KM: That can be a concern. That's true.

TA: And also I think there's a difference between...they bring a welcomed perspective to the committees oftentimes and I got to know a lot of graduate students well that way. I remember when I was, to jump ahead a minute, when I

was interim dean of the college the second time and had set up a committee to search for new director of Women's Studies made up of faculty and graduate students. The graduate students and the faculty were very divided on who they wanted and I finally sided with the faculty members over the graduate students because I felt that the faculty members are permanent, they are the people who have to work with this person as a colleague. The graduate students come, they do their work, they get their degree and they leave. So it can present problems but if you appoint a faculty committee you got to respect their....and faculty committees might not always choose the person you want chosen either.

[laughter]

KM: That's right, exactly.

TA: But that was mainly what I did as associate dean and I did that for years.

KM: And then you were the interim. And then you were head of the English department.

TA: Yeah I was interim Dean of Liberal Arts for a year and a half after David left to become president of Hunter, he later became president of Pace University. And I never really wanted to be permanent dean. I didn't become a candidate, I never really had any desire to be the full time dean. I never really liked very much the fundraising aspect of the deanship which has become more and more important. I mean I did it when I had to, I met with donors and it was successful and I enjoyed them. I met wonderful people when I was interim dean, my wife and I met really interesting people. Alums and friends here and elsewhere in the

country, some of whom we remain friends with and we still hear from at Christmastime and so forth. But I really never liked that. I did it and I was fine at it but I never really liked that part of it. I liked even less the obligation to go to the football games. I'm not a sports fan at all, I mean it's just ridiculously difficult for me to sit down and watch a football game. I grew up in Cleveland and the Cleveland Indians, the baseball team, when I was in grade school was really a super team and I used to go to the games often and a lot of the...particularly the pitchers lived in our neighborhood during the summer so we know them. I mean I'd see Bob Feller regularly and Jack Lemon and Garcia and Wynn and these people and so forth and so on and went religiously to a lot of the baseball games but I was never a football fan even though my grandfather's cousin was Paul Brown, the coach of the Cleveland Browns.

KM: My father went to all the games.

TA: Yeah and when I was in college at Boston College my roommate for my last two years was Chuck Sullivan whose father Billy Sullivan had founded the Boston Patriots and I never went to a Patriots game. They always said you can come to a game if you want and I never had any interest and this was sort of you know...

KM: You knew all the people. [laughter]

TA: They still had me at their house for Thanksgiving dinner and so forth and didn't feel any less about me that I didn't like football. But now our younger son lives in Boston, he makes up for it. He's a rabid New England Patriots fan and Celtics and...

KM: The Red Sox?

TA: Red Sox. So he makes up for my lack of interest in sports.

KM: He's picking up where dad left off.

TA: So I never really enjoyed going to the football games, especially the first term I was interim dean we were still without the covered stadium so you would sit there in the freezing cold. And I'll never forget one game, it was late in the season and I think it was Wisconsin and my wife and I were just freezing. You were sitting there and you were so cold and we got up to go to the restroom between the third and fourth quarter and Bob Ringel who was...was he called provost? I'm not sure he was called...

KM: Vice President for Academic Affairs.

50:00 **TA:** Vice president. Yeah he was a few rows back and he said you'd better come back for the rest of this or your budget will hurt. So we dutifully came back for the rest of the game but we were usually entertaining people. It became much less painful when I was up in the box and the second time I was interim dean we had the covered box and food.

KM: That does enhance it.

TA: Yeah and you could just sit there and talk to people and you didn't have to pay much attention to the game really but you could do your fundraising bid and so forth and talk to other deans and people. But I never really had any desire to be permanent dean of the college. When I left that I didn't expect to become head of

English, I thought I would just be a professor but then I was head of English for five years. I found the headship a more difficult job than the deanship, I think it is a more difficult job. You have more personnel problems, more issues you have to work with, you don't have the support staff you have in the dean's office. And it was a difficult job and when I became interim dean again I always told the heads that I realize that their job was more difficult. It was good that I had done it, I think I saw what they were facing. And I think one of the major things that I accomplished when I was head was we hired very, very well and I always told the other heads, they would complain about budgetary problems, the best thing you can do is to hire well and take every advantage you can of bringing in people because you don't know when the money will be there. So we hired very, very well and I did a lot of spousal hiring, just an enormous amount of spousal hiring. In English and then when I was interim dean the two times in the college and we got some terrific people that way. So you know as head you're doing the faculty salaries, you're doing budgets, you're doing the usual kind of administrative things along with...I always taught and I always kept writing during all of my years.

KM: You're talking about you didn't want to be the dean but they probably approached you do you wish to have yourself considered as a candidate? You probably have to tell them that.

TA: Well I did. I mean when I was interim dean the first time Bob Ringel asked me I would be a candidate and I think I probably could have been appointed permanent dean and I said no there were enormous budgetary issues facing the

college and I knew those were not going to be eradicated and I just didn't think there was going to be enough I could do and I tried to get the college in the best shape budgetarily as I could for the incoming dean. And then when I became interim dean the second time a dean left or was removed very suddenly by Sally Mason who was provost at that time and she called me and asked me if I would come back in. I had gone back into the dean's office as interim associate dean for research so I have various titles that I've had for six months or whatever. It was a period of six months when I was actually acting head of Visual and Performing Arts when they were still in the Quonset huts. And I used to go over every afternoon and sort of do that kind of thing.

KM: I gave a couple of demos over there.

TA: And I got to know those people very well. When I was interim dean the first time in fact, Dennis Ichiyama, who was head of VPA, said don't you want to be permanent dean and you can be the dean when the new Visual and Performing Arts building is dedicated and I said to him Dennis that will not happen in my lifetime because it hadn't really been started. And it turned out the second time that I was interim dean...

KM: They had the dedication.

TA: Dedication and so I wound up doing the remarks for the dedication, I was the dean. But I had avoided all the pain in the middle of the planning and the building of that. So I was interim dean a second time for just a year during that period, the

first time was a year and half, for just a year and after that I did go back to English and taught. I was just a professor for a couple years before I retired.

KM: OK. How about any awards or honors that you want to share?

TA: Well I mean Phi Beta Kappa stands out.

KM: OK. And you did some teaching things.

TA: Yeah there were certificates for graduate teaching. I think I was always better liked by my graduate students than my undergraduate students. I think my undergraduates found me a little difficult, a little demanding, I think I was demanding. I was very demanding on the writing, I spent an awful lot of time editing and helping their writing or trying to. They oftentimes wondered why do you...they weren't that interested in having all this notation on their writing but my line finally became when they said why do you do this, I'd say there is going to come a day when you are going to write something very, very important. I said a letter of application for a job and you don't want to look stupid. You know but I was a demanding undergraduate teacher, especially as far as the writing goes. And a kind of no-nonsense teacher, I was never an entertainer I don't think, it's just not in my personality. I didn't tell jokes and stories and so forth, I guess I have a sense of humor that's a little different, maybe a little dry and subtle but I was just never a show person.

KM: You have your own style. Yeah.

TA: So they worked but my graduate students I think liked me a lot better.

55:00

KM: And you worked a little more closely at that level.

TA: I worked a little more closely and they appreciated the help that I gave them in their writing. The graduate students, even in our Rhetoric program, there was a time when they used to have to take literature courses and a lot of them took my American drama or my British drama and loved it and would thank me afterwards for the help I gave them in writing. And I know that one of the directors of the program said that she knew that I helped the students write because just because you're a graduate student doesn't mean you're going to be a good writer.

KM: That's right.

TA: And a lot of them were not good writers and I spent a lot of time trying to help them with their writing.

KM: Right and the more practice you get the better you are.

TA: But it's different, you need to know more to teach graduate students but it's not as difficult in the classroom because they're more ready to respond. I mean I always taught by the discussion method and I didn't lecture and a lot of undergrads didn't care for that either. They wanted somebody who would come in and give them a lot of information they could take down and parrot back. And I was just never that type of teacher. We always had discussion, very little lecture.

KM: Interaction is key.

TA: Interaction and I would ask questions and that was not something that a lot of them liked. I had great success in certain courses. I think when I did the short story on film they liked that class a lot. I'm not saying that I didn't do well as an undergrad teacher; I think there were a lot of them who did appreciate me but a lot of them found me a difficult, demanding teacher and a no-nonsense kind of teacher.

KM: That's OK. Outstanding event? Anything that you would like to share with us?

TA: You mean here at Purdue or...?

KM: Any place.

TA: I guess I always liked to say maybe the outstanding event is yet to come or something you know.

KM: There you go, exactly.

TA: Maybe my wife. We've been best friends for forty two years.

KM: What about family?

TA: We have two sons, both of whom initially were in music. Our older son went to Northwestern in saxophone performance, very quickly changed to biology, finally went to medical school at Loyola Stritch and is now a family practice doctor here in Lafayette, he's a geriatrician though he sees all ages. He did his fellowship in geriatrics at St. Vincent's in Indianapolis and is married and we have two grandsons, Simon and William are the two. And our younger son Chris is in Boston. He was a percussionist, went to Oberlin Music Conservatory but also

gave up music. He has a recording studio in his basement but he does computer support work for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the executive branch.

The governor's office and the executive branch, he does their computer stuff.

KM: Does he like it?

TA: Yeah I mean I think it's a lot of the same thing over and over. When you work for the state they're unionized, he's not a political appointee and he's always worked for both Republicans and Democrats and they're not terribly well paid. The benefits are good but not a lot of variety I think and a lot of problem solving.

KM: That's because they want a change of administration.

TA: Change of administrations and you bring in these new people who are not...well I'm not computer savvy at all and a lot of people who aren't and so he does a lot of...

KM: Hand-holding and you know.

TA: When Jane Swift was governor he was actually her computer person and had a little office right in the state house and he still goes over there sometimes but does a lot of other things with the executive branch. I think he'd like to get into...you just can't change jobs now, there's no mobility right now.

KM: That's right.

1:00:00 **TA:** There's no mobility at all.

KM: No. Anything that I forget or I'll let you wrap it up.

TA: I don't think so. I think you've done a pretty good job of covering everything.

KM: What about post-Purdue?

TA: Well I'm retired.

KM: You've done any traveling?

TA: Well we've always done a little traveling; we've done quite a bit of European traveling. We like to vacation in large cities because we're here in this small town and so we're moviegoers, museum goers. We do some traveling; we try to get away a couple times. We'll go to Boston a few times a year of course and always enjoy that. We go to New York occasionally, we go to Europe occasionally. I do a lot of walking.

KM: A lot of different things to do that you enjoy.

TA: Yeah a lot of different things and volunteer work. I mean I'm on the board of the art museum locally. I updated the hundred-year history of the museum for them. Right now we're getting a strategic plan for them so I've done those kinds of things and my wife does volunteer work as well, extensive volunteer work, more than I do in fact.

KM: That's great.

TA: So we'll always probably have a home here because our older son is here with our grandchildren.

KM: Sure and that's kind of nice. That's good. Thank you Tom very much.

TA: OK. Thank you very much.

End of the Interview

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*Proper names may be spelled incorrectly.