The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History

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Arkansas Memories Project

Bill Harrison Surprise Interviews

Kelly Lycan

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

June 11, 2011

Fayetteville, Arkansas

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Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at https://pryorcenter.uark.edu/. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/ redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
  - annotations for clarification and identification; and
  - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Kelly Lycan on June 11, 2011, in Fayetteville, Arkansas. This series of interviews took place during a birthday celebration for William Harrison.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Uh—Kelly, today's date is—uh—June the eleventh. Uh—the year is 2011. We are at Laurie Harrison's house . . .

Kelly Lycan: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . in Fayetteville, Arkansas. [*Camera clicks*] And we're doing a series of—uh—interviews of folks that have—uh—come back to—to party and—and—uh—have some camaraderie with Bill and all the students that had—that the program has spawned. [*Camera clicks*] Uh—it is part of—uh—the Bill Harrison project that the Pryor Center has. The—um—it's the David and Barbara—uh—Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History.

KL: Hmm.

SL: Uh—we travel all over the state . . .

KL: Yeah.

SL: . . . doing interviews, getting stories—uh—from Arkansans and people that have been in Arkansas and contributed or took something with them from Arkansas. Um—we will—uh—uh—we're recording in audio and video. We will preserve these

recordings forever. It's a—it's an archive.

KL: Yeah.

SL: Uh—we will transcribe this interview. We will send that transcription to you as well as—uh—what we call a rough DVD, which is just the raw footage.

KL: Mh-hmm.

[00:01:08] SL: I'll ask you to read the transcript, look at the interview. If there's anything [*horn honks*] that we do here today that you're not comfortable with, that you wouldn't want the rest of the world to know [*KL laughs*], you need to tell us then.

KL: [*Laughs*] Okay.

SL: Uh [*camera clicks*]—and we will do everything we can to make it comfortable for you.

KL: Yeah.

SL: And once that's done, we will then post selected video segments from this interview on our website. We will post the entire transcript of the edited—uh—transcript and—uh—the entire audio of what you've approved. And that'll be on the Pryor Center web. It'll be available for everyone. We will encourage documentarians, researchers, Arkansas historians, historians—uh—everybody—to come and—and—uh—use it . . .

KL: Yeah.

SL: . . . in—uh—ways that we—that we feel appropriate. We'll—we'll look after you, but—uh [*KL laughs*]—the main story is here—we're recording this stuff, we're gonna keep it forever, and we're gonna make it available to everybody.

KL: Yeah, that's great.

SL: And if you're okay with that . . .

KL: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

KL: Yeah.

SL: That's a great answer.

KL: I'm good. [*Laughs*]

SL: Okay.

KL: Yeah.

[00:02:17] SL: All right. Well—uh—Kelly, we always start with—uh—the interviewee giving us their full name,, and if there's unusual spellings, we ask you to spell that—and when and where you were born.

KL: Well, my name's Kelly Lycan, and the last name is *L-Y-C-A-N*, and I was born in 1958 in Wooster, Ohio.

SL: And what were your parents' names?

KL: Parents' names were Goodwin Arthur Lycan and—uh—Floris

Charleen Lycan.

SL: And her maiden name?

KL: Schueffler.

SL: Schueffler.

KL: Good German name. *S-C-H-U-E-F-F-L-E-R*.

[00:02:59] SL: A—and what were their occupations?

KL: Well, my dad was a welder by trade. He did not finish high school—uh—started workin'. He had been in the Korean War. Uh—learned the welding trade when he was in the war for the army and—uh—later on, finished his GED and then—uh—started his own company. Uh—later on, my parents divorced in [19]69, and so he went up to Michigan—uh—Bridgman, Michigan, and started a company up there.

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: And—uh—my mom was just an old farm girl from—uh—Apple Creek, Ohio, and she lived on the farm and had a lotta different—uh—jobs. And after parents were divorced, she worked a lotta different jobs. And—uh—I had one sister, so she was supportin' two kids and tryin' to get that done.

SL: So—um—your folks divorced while you were growing up? Is that . . .

KL: Yes, 1969, so I was bout ten years old . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

KL: . . . when that happened.

SL: That's hard.

KL: Yeah, it's—that was a little difficult. Uh—you know, when you're that young, you just kinda go with the flow. You're not really 100 percent—uh—cognizant of everything that's goin' on, but all you . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: . . . know is that—uh—Daddy's not around as much as he used to be.

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: So . . .

[00:04:11] SL: So—uh—did you just attend—uh—public schools or . . .

KL: Yeah. Uh—we actually—we lived in Canton, Ohio, for a while, and then after the divorce we moved back to Wooster, Ohio, and—uh—went to school there, went to Wooster High School and then—uh—went to Bowling Green State University for my undergrad. Uh—graduated from there in [19]81 and then—uh—worked for a couple years and then came down to Fayetteville in the fall of [19]83.

SL: And you came to Fayetteville for the writing program?

KL: Yes.

SL: How did you hear about the writing program?

KL: Uh—I did a little research—uh—when I was—uh—had just graduated. Uh—I got my B.F.A. in creative writing at—uh—Bowling Green. And—uh—actually, John Holmes—uh—who was a instructor here had done a—a short stint at Bowling Green, and—uh—so some of my instructors at Bowling Green had mentioned—uh—that he was at University of Arkansas. And—uh—there were two other places—I'd—uh—applied at University of Arizona and University of Oregon—uh—along with Arkansas and—uh—ended up here.

[00:05:15] SL: So—uh—what—what was the—what tipped the scales between the other schools and Arkansas?

KL: [*Laughs*] They accepted me here. [*Laughter*]

SL: And so you—uh—you had to write a little story to send it in?

KL: Indeed I did, and I believe—uh—it was a—a story about a—a young football player tryin' to—uh—make the grade from college to—uh—professional ranks and goin'—and through a lot of tryouts. Not any autobiographical information at all. But—uh—uh—I think Whitehead must have—uh—read that story, and—uh—he probably thought that—uh—mighta had a—a slight kindred spirit there and—uh—and musta liked something in the

story, so here . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: . . . here's where I ended up.

[00:05:58] SL: Well, did you play sports in high school?

KL: I did. I was—in high school and in college, I played football and ran track in—in . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

KL: . . . college too.

SL: Uh-huh.

KL: So . . .

SL: So you probably had some—uh—firsthand experiences to at least build the story around, and so he could probably tell the voice was there, I bet.

KL: Yeah.

SL: So—um—you get accepted. And did that come with a teaching position as well?

KL: Yeah, we had to—just the typical GA position, teachin' two classes and takin' two classes, and that was just a—a fearsome thing for me because—uh—I had done—uh—mostly poetry when I was a undergrad up at—uh—Bowling Green, and I was—I was thinkin' that I was probably not that great of a poet and that—uh—fiction is what I should probably try to do. And you know,

sometimes as a young poet, you know, you think to yourself that grammar isn't really all . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: . . . that important, you know, because poets—you know, they don't use apostrophes or capital letters and all that stuff. Then when we got here, we—you know, old Claude Faulkner was our taskmaster, and we were gonna have to teach Faulkner English and all those things that I had avoided for all those years—suddenly, I had to learn those, and it was about the scariest thing I'd ever done, but it was the most useful thing I'd ever done. You know, it—when you're growin' up, you think grammar's kind of like electricity. It's just like some kind of magic thing, and you know it works, but you're not quite sure how.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:07:26] KL: And—uh—when Claude, in his inimitable way—uh—his wonderful sense of humor that he had—uh—it was the simplest and most logic thing I'd ever learned. So it was—it was a great—uh—learning experience for me—uh—learnin' how to do that and then goin' into the classroom and then—uh—actually teaching those things that I learned. It was—it was a great experience. Uh—I was only twenty-four years old at the time

and looked like I was about sixteen, I think, and most of my students thought I was the student—uh—in there too, so that was kind of interesting. But—uh—you know, then we got—uh—the things that I really wanted to do was to learn how to write. And when I finally got a chance to start takin' some classes with—uh—Bill and—and Jim Whitehead and—uh—uh—later on, Skip—uh—Skip Hays.

SL: Hays. Mh-hmm.

KL: It was just—it was great.

[00:08:14] SL: What was your first impression of—uh—Bill?

KL: Well, both he and Jim reminded me of all the football and basketball coaches I'd ever had in my life. You know, they were—they were just—uh—straight shooters, and—uh—they would tell you in a heartbeat if you had done somethin' incorrectly. They would not hesitate to let you know in any uncertain terms. And—uh—I know that some people, that mighta been a little [*laughs*]—well, it was intimidating to me too, but you know, I—I knew—I—you can't not take it personally, but I'd—I realized that—uh—when they told me how pitiful my attempts at writing were [*SL laughs*], I knew that what they were tryin' to do was to shame me into workin' my ass off a little bit har—you know, work harder, study your trade, try to get

better—just like a good coach would try to do. And—uh—you know, I—uh—I tried [*laughs*] to work hard. And—and you wanted to work hard because you knew that if you did and you actually wrote at least one sentence out of twenty pages that was worth lookin' at, you knew that along with the—the—the negative comments [*laughs*] that they would sometimes give you, you knew that there—if you did it right, that you were gonna get that little bit of praise, and that's kinda what we lived for, you know, just to get that—"Well, okay, Lycan. That wasn't—that wasn't too bad of a sentence right there," you know. And that—and that's what you would really work hard for, just to get one little glimmer—uh—that was, you know, acceptable in their eyes.

[00:09:43] SL: Was that really the first time that anyone had actually really looked at—word for word—what you were doing?

KL: Yeah, you know, when we were in undergrad, I think—uh—I had some really good teachers at Bowling Green State University too, but—eh—it was not as intense, you know. And in under—uh—in graduate school—uh—and I think with Bill and Jim, you know, they had created this program, and it was—it was important to them, and—and they felt a responsibility. You know, they're—they're—it's just like if you own a business. You know, if you're

turnin' out a product, you want that product to be reliable and dependable, and you want people to be proud—and you wanna be proud of the product that you turn out. And it's—it's like a coach with a team too. I mean, you wanna have a successful team out there on the field or on the court. And—uh—you know, I think they really, really took a lot of pride in makin' sure that these people that they were turnin' out of the program were gonna be good writers and dedicated to their craft and dedicated to the trade. And—and—uh—if—if you weren't, they were gonna find out in—in a short period of time.

[00:10:58] SL: Um—you know, this program—um—uh—that—uh—they put together, it really blurs on where the program ends and the—uh—where life is. I mean, it's—and it seems like to me that—uh—it was never—the teaching—the—the teaching side of it never really stopped. And it had as much to do with the academic side as it did the life side. And—and so—um—I'm gonna ask you a little bit about Fayetteville and the environment that this program was placed into. So what was your impression of Fayetteville when you first got here?

KL: Well, I had really never been away from home very much. I was from Ohio, went to college in Ohio—you know, I'd taken a couple family vacations to Yellowstone, and—uh—you know, I didn't

know anything about Arkansas. My first trip down here, when I—uh—had a—an apartment, and I was comin' down for the first time in—in August, had my mom's old Ford Econoline van and had . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:12:07] KL: . . . all—all my belongings—whatever I could—it all fit in that one little van, and I was comin' down, and it was hotter than hell. And I—you know, I don't really like drivin' the interstates, and you know, back in those days, we still kinda drove on two-lane roads. And I came down through—uh—someplace—I can't remember exactly where—comin' through Arkansas and—uh—I kept seein' signs that said, "Caution, open water ahead. Be prepared to stop." And I thought, "Why in the hell didn't they take these signs down when they built the bridge across the river or lake or whatever?" And so I'm just wheelin' around bout sixty-five miles an hour, came around a curve, and [*stomps*] there is a lake. Just—the road ended at the lake. And I'm goin', "What the hell?" [*SL laughs*] And I had to wait for the ferry to come across, and they were clear on the other side. And I'm like, "Okay, I guess I'm in a different place now," [*SL laughs*] you know. And—uh—and at that time—I came here in the fall of [19]83, and—uh—I think Fayetteville had about thirty-

six or thirty-nine thousand people at the time. But it was still the fourth-largest city in the state of Arkansas. So I thought, "Well, that's—they don't call it the natural state for nothin', I guess." And—uh . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:13:18] KL: But it was great because—and this—and the university was a lot smaller than I thought too, because, you know, you always hear about the Razorbacks and the Hogs, and you think it's one of those major pla—like Ohio State or Oklahoma, where you got forty, fifty thousand students. And I think they only had sixteen thousand students . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: . . . at the time, and it was a lot smaller. But there was so much just intellectual activity—uh—in—you know, Dickson Street and the downtown area, the square. It was just great, you know. You could walk around, and—and you could hear good music. Uh—you know, just the whole arts community—it was so much fun for—you know, I was twenty-four years old and meeting new people that had all these ideas. You know, some people just seemed like they'd come from Mars, you know. They'd just—just a completely different atmosphere, but it was so much fun to just get immersed in that and then to have these larger-than-

life figures, you know, Harrison and Whitehead, out there, and—uh—these guys were just kinda like the—the drum majors. And—and all this crazy—uh—chaos of—of young people that were meeting each other and—and gettin' to know each other and havin' relationships and different relationships and all that kind of stuff goin' on. And it was a real exciting time—uh—in our lives, but . . .

[00:14:36] SL: Do you remember some of the—uh—bands that you would hear?

KL: Oh man, the Bel Airs was one of my favorite. Uh—I never realized that three guys could make so much music. We used to go down to George's, or when it used to be Jose's down on Dickson Street and—uh—listen to those guys. Uh—shoot, I remember—uh—seein'—uh—Trout Fishing in America was down there. They were just a fun—uh . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: . . . group. But the—the Bel Airs was the one that kinda stood out to me the most. I liked that kind of music and—uh . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: . . . those guys were enjoyable. Whenever they were in town, we'd try to—to go listen to those guys.

SL: They're still play.

KL: Oh really?

SL: They still come here to play.

KL: Yeah?

SL: Yeah. Uh—what about the Cates?

KL: Oh yeah, the Cate Brothers, yeah. They were very good too. Uh—I liked those guys. Uh . . .

SL: I guess Zorro and the Blue Footballs were already gone by the time you got here.

KL: Who was that?

SL: Zorro and the Blue Footballs.

KL: Oh yeah, yeah.

SL: You—you don't remember them?

KL: I remember them, yeah.

SL: Yeah, they—they phased out earlier.

KL: Yeah.

[00:15:31] SL: Um—okay, so—uh—you've got—uh—you're in this—uh—intellectual enclave. Um—you've got a—uh—uh—the—uh—Fayetteville and Dickson Street is kind of the—the oven where all this stuff is stirrin'. And—and—uh—you—uh—these guys—uh—Jim and—Jim Whitehead and—and—um—Bill Harrison—uh—they do take on the responsibility for their students. They do—I mean, how often—where else have you ever heard where a

student would throw a party and the faculty would come?

KL: Yeah, not very often. And they were—they were so involved, and—uh—I mean, you just really felt like they cared about you completely. I mean, they wanted you to succeed as a writer, but they wanted to make sure that you were okay too. And—and you know, the—the—the clichéd starving artist—uh—ideal wa—was not all that much of a cliché. I mean, there were a lot of people who were in the program who really were in—in dire straits, maybe before they had come to the program or during the time they were here . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:16:49] KL: . . . who really wanted to be writers. And I mean, there were people, you know, who—who were maybe next to homeless at some point. You know, shackin' up with somebody else. Sometimes, you know, sleepin' in the park or doin' whatever. But they had a—a—a real desire to be a writer, and they were tryin' to make it through the program. And—uh—you know, I know that—uh—I know that those guys—throughout all those years that they had been here, I know that they really helped a lot of people out—uh—in many different ways—uh—whether it was, you know, puttin' a roof over their head for—uh—a day or two or—or whatever, you know. Bailin' 'em out of

jail if they got into trouble or—uh—you know, loanin' 'em a car if they got in an accident or—or who knows what? Uh—just—even if it was just givin' some real interesting life—uh—advice, you know, about—about just different things about growin' up, about writing, about how to—cau—you know, writers are a little bit different. [*Laughs*] Sometimes we think a little differently, and some—and some of us did have trouble fitting into the norm of society. I mean, it's just like any other type of artist. I think sometimes some of us live on the fringes a little bit and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KL: . . . and—uh—you know, that was one of the things that we had to learn, too. Along with the craft of writing, we had to learn how to get along in [*laughs*]—in—in the world out there, you know, to—to be able to sustain ourselves enough so that we could do what we wanted to do. So—and then those guys were great at that because they clearly were doing that themselves, you know. I . . .

[00:18:25] SL: What was the first—um—your first impression of Bill when you first met him?

KL: Seemed like such a nice guy. [*Laughs*] Nice, clean-cut guy. He was always well dressed. And he was—he was—in some ways, you know, he and Whitehead, like I say, were both kinda like

those—those—the mean football coach who would just cut you down and ridicule your—your talents and—and—uh—your parents and your grandparents and, you know, your entire line of descendants and [*SL laughs*]—just to shame you. But he was a little different than Jim. He—he kinda had a little more subtle irony to him, and—uh—you had to be on your toes with Bill. But I really enjoyed—uh—you know, that since he had been across the world—you know, especially his travels in Africa and everything. And that kinda added a little mystique—uh—for me to him because I—I was interested in some of the—I'd never been to some of those places, and—and that was a—a—just a grand time to listen to him tell stories—uh—about those experiences in our classes. [00:19:35] And—uh—you know, he was—he was—uh—very good at—uh—just kinda the way Claude Faulkner made grammar seem very simple to me, Bill was the same way about how to build a story—uh—just gave us some very common-sense, bare-bones "This is what a story needs to have." I mean, he wasn't gonna tell us, "This is exactly how you do it," but "This is what it needs to have," and made it seem a lot simpler to be able to make a story. And . . .

SL: He broke it down for you.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:13] SL: And Jim?

KL: Yeah, Jim—you know, Jim was—he was just larger than life—I hate to use that analogy again, but just a big guy with big ideas—a loud voice that would fill the classroom. Such a—he just loved the good [*laughs*] parts, I think, and the bad parts of all of our writing, and he would laugh sometimes about some of the most horrid lines that we would write. Sometimes he would not—he would just laugh. And [*SL laughs*] you would realize—"God, how did I screw this up so bad?" But he was just full of life. And both those guys—and really, I think that was one of the things that probably I learned most, is just to look at the world just completely differently. They just loved the world. Those guys saw the world and all the beauty in it. I know that I was talkin' with Steve Yarbrough the other night, who was from the Delta country down in Mississippi, and for him, growin' up in there, that was the ugliest place in the world. And I remember John Holmes used to say that about Bowling Green State University—"It was the ugliest place I've ever been to." But you know, there's Whitehead, who thinks that the Delta is just this beautiful—has this dark mystery to it and thinks it's a beautiful place. And I think, to this day, I just—you know, I still—I

really—I think I carried that away from the program, just lookin' at the world and seein' the beautiful part. You know, certainly there are ugly parts [*laughs*], and I've been to some of 'em. But even in those ugly parts, there are things that there are still interesting—about people too. You know, we always have those beautiful parts to us and the not-so-beautiful parts. But you learn to take it all together. And I think that's what the—and Jim—he was just so full of that, you know, and that was interesting to be arou—'cause he was just a fun guy to be around.

[00:22:12] SL: So maybe both of 'em taught you how to see?

KL: Absolutely. Yeah, I mean, I—when you're young, you know, you think you know a lot of stuff anyhow. But—yeah. People, too, you know, and not just the world around you—but just learn how to talk to people. That was somethin' that I had never experienced before I came down here also. In the Midwest, you know, people have a way of interacting. I came down here, and people would sit around on a hot summer night, on a Friday night, with a couple beers. And somebody would talk and tell a story, and everybody was sittin' around listenin'. And when they got done, somebody else would talk, and they'd tell a story. And I thought, "This is pretty cool. I enjoy this, you know. It's

just—I'd never known"—you know, up in the Midwest, somebody'll start talkin', and somebody'll interrupt and some—you know, you have three different conversations goin' on at once. And it was just really enjoyable to hear somebody and—who was a good storyteller, and they would tell a story, and everybody would listen. And that was just somethin' that I had never experienced before, and maybe that's the Southern tradition of storytelling. Maybe that's where it comes from. But it was just somethin' that I still recall fondly and wish that I could do more of.

[00:23:29] SL: Well, I was gonna ask you—do you carry that with you? I mean, is that something that you've honed in your life? [*KL laughs*] Do you tell stories when you're about now, and do you wait for someone else to tell you a good story or . . .

KL: I hope that somebody's gonna tell [*laughs*] me a good story someday. I enjoy it. I guess I've taken kind of a different track from a lot of my colleagues. I did do some teaching and some writing for a while, and then somehow I ended up goin' in a complete opposite direction, and I'm actually a women's track coach up at a university right now. And so, you know, I kinda have a captive audience sometimes. I got fifty young women on my team, and I tell lots of stories, and they just wish I would

stop tellin' these [*SL laughs*] stories, you know. But it's—what's really interesting is I think some of my success as a coach has come from the skills that I learned here, because in recruiting it's all about storytelling, 'cause I'm tryin' to tell them stories about our team and our university. And I have to listen because one thing I've found out—I was tryin' to get people who have no clue—had never heard of Western Michigan University or Kalamazoo. You know, they think it's like Timbuktu. And they wanna know that the—and especially parents, too—if they're gonna send their seventeen-, eighteen-year-old daughter somewhere, they wanna know that they're gonna be dealin' with real people who care about them. And so I try to listen to their stories, and I think the fact that I listen and let them tell their stories—I think it makes them more comfortable with me—parents also. And I think that's one—we've had a little bit of success up there, and I think that might be one reason why.

[00:25:13] SL: I see—I guess—yeah. Both those guys hungered for good stories.

KL: Yeah.

SL: And they put themselves out there where you could tell a good story. I mean, you could—whether it was at a party or whether it was at a workshop or in the classroom, it was pretty much,

"Tell me the story" . . .

KL: Yeah.

SL: . . . wasn't it? I mean . . .

[00:25:40] KL: Yeah, absolutely. And I think they really enjoyed holding court at—you know, at a lot of those parties, but I think they enjoyed a good story from many of their students just as much as bein' able to tell their stories. And I think—as all of us do, I think over the years they start appropriating some of the stories that they heard from the students, and then they can make it their own, too. Last night was just enjoyable, sittin' on top of the hill, you know, hearin' Skip tell a story and then hearin' [*SL laughs*] Bill tell a story. And it's the same story. And Yarbrough will tell a story, and then it's the same story, but they all have a little different twist. And then we all sat down together. And then they were arguin' about [*laughter*] the story, which was just great, you know. But that's what storytelling is. You take it. You know, there are certain facts or certain ideas, and then you make it your own. Everybody has a little different voice and a little different sound, a little different music comes out. But you know, that's the interesting of part of art. I guess musicians probably can do the same thing. They can look at a score or a sheet of music, and everybody makes it sound a little

bit different. [*Sighs*]

SL: Make it yours.

KL: Yeah.

[00:26:51] SL: I know that you're in the—that you've got a road trip ahead of you today. Is there—was there ever a moment with either Jim or Bill that was like, "Oh, I get it now," or a bulb went off in your head? Is there—was there a time—I mean, I know you talked about, you know, getting that one good line, and you knew these guys were gonna read the whole thing, and they'd see all the bad stuff, but they would also see the good stuff. And they could be relied upon to look at your work, but—and that in itself is kind of an aha thing—that finally, someone is really paying attention. But was there some—any advice, or was there any—was there a moment with Jim or Bill or both or—that really—you carry with you all the time?

KL: Oh yeah. I think both of them must've talk about how pitiful and miserable my early efforts at writing [*laughs*] were. And I think both of them—I remember this distinctly—I walked into Jim's office one time, and it was—I can't remember the year, but it was *Great American Short Stories of 1996*. You know, they come out with a collection every year. He said, "Goddamn it, Lycan. Take this book home. Read it from cover to cover, and

then maybe you'll figure out what a short story is supposed to look like!" [*Laughter*] And I said, "Okay." And I did. I read the damn thing from cover to cover. [00:28:23] And I realized what he was tryin' to tell me. It was like, you know, basically, just like a good athlete, you need—if you're a basketball player, you need to get out, boy—you need to get out in the gym and shoot some free throws and just shoot millions and millions until you can do it with your eyes closed. And he was seeing in me that I didn't have enough experience yet with this craft and I needed to read and just read and read and read. And I think it just—maybe the lightbulb went off a little bit later, but what I got out of that was, like, this is a serious endeavor when you're tryin' to do this, and you need to really work at it. You know, a lot of people read a poem or read a story and just—"Oh, you know, anybody can sit down at the computer or sit down or whatever and write a story." But to make a good story, it takes a lotta hard work. And that was the thing that both of those guys, and Skip to this day—you know, carryin' on the tradition—I think they make you understand that if you're gonna do this, you better damn well do it the best you can. And you have to be serious about it and diligent about it and work your ass off, so that it does look like a flashy, finished product. You know, in the

Olympics, if you see Usain Bolt runnin' down the track, it just—you know, in the hundred-meter dash—"You know, all of us could do that. We could all go out—oh, that looks so easy." They don't see what you have to do all year long—all the sweat, all the pain you have to go through in the weight room, and the drudgery. Hot days, cold days, when you're workin' out. That's the same way as a writer. They don't see those days when you're—you drag yourself out of bed, and you go to your table, to your computer or whatever, and you don't feel like it, and you got all these other things on your mind. And you gotta sit there and work at it. And that was the thing that those guys really impressed upon me, that you gotta work at this to be good at it. It doesn't, you know, come to you in a dream. So—and they were just great. I hear their voices in my head—you know, all the time I think about those guys. I hear myself saying things to my track team that those guys [*laughs*] used to say to me—hopefully not in some of the same [*laughter*] language.

SL: Vernacular.

[00:30:41] KL: But I probably do. But you know, it's the same thing—just caring about your craft and caring about the product that you put out there and tryin' to care about the people that you deal with. And those guys just did that, you know. They

just—they loved the program that they created. They loved the students, most of us. [*Laughter*] And you know, we certainly love those guys in turn. It was great this weekend to see all the people together and just see the love that they all have for these guys. So it's been fun.

[00:31:15] SL: That's good. Anything else you wanna say?

KL: You know, just that—you know, Jim's gone, and none of us are gonna last forever, but I know that—you know, I'm still tellin' the stories, and hopefully—I know some of my former athletes—I've been at it for—coachin' over twenty years—over twenty-five years now, and when I see some of my former athletes—they're all tellin' the stories, you know, things—so it's just—I think that's great. I know—and what you guys are doin' here. It's great to just keep these stories alive about important people who have done some great things. I mean, that was the thing that I was tryin' to impress upon Bill and Skip last night. You—as a coach, sometimes I forget how many people's lives you affect in a positive way when you're a teacher or a coach or somethin' like that. And just all those people are—have spread out to the four winds. You know, they're all over the world, you know. These former writers from the Arkansas creative writing program, they're all over the place, you know. I see 'em all the time,

even in my coaching life. But those people spread out all over the place, and you don't realize sometimes how many lives you touch. But we'll keep tellin' the stories. We won't let the stories die.

SL: Good stuff, buddy. You gotta get on the road.

KL: Yeah.

SL: Thank you. Now . . .

KL: Thank you very.

[00:32:37 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]