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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Bill Harrison Surprise Interviews

Kathy Walton

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

June 11, 2011

Fayetteville, Arkansas

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Objective

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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 Kathy Walton 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: My name is Scott Lunsford, and we're part of the—uh—Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History. Uh—the things that we do here today will be preserved forever. Uh—that's—our mission is to make sure that the stuff never goes away. Uh—it'll be archived at the Pryor Center. There'll also be a DVD copy of this stuff in the Special Collections Department at Mullins Library at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville campus. Um [*camera clicks*]—we will provide you a transcript of your interview, and we will provide you a DVD of your raw footage of this interview. And I'll ask you to look at the [*Kathy Walton sighs*]—look at the DVD and [*KW sniffs*] at least read the transcript. And if there's anything that you find in that transcript or you see that you don't like or you don't . . .

Kathy Walton: That makes me look totally . . .

SL: . . . feel comfortable . . .

KW: . . . foolish. Okay.

SL: Uh . . .

KW: I can . . .

[00:00:54] SL: . . . then we'll take it out for you.

KW: Cool.

SL: And we'll send those changes to you, and once you're happy and—and comfortable, then we will post this stuff, and we'll take—uh—generally, we take highlights from an interview, videowise, and we'll post that. [*Camera clicks*] But we will post the—uh—transcript, the approved transcript, in its totality and the audio of the interview in its totality. And that will be available to everyone in the world. And we will encourage documentarians and [*camera clicks*] Arkansas historians, researchers, Arkansas students, both in public school and higher education. We encourage them to—to come to the Pryor Center website, and you can certainly just Google Pryor Center . . .

KW: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and you'll see what we're up to.

KW: Cool.

SL: And [*KW sniffs*] if all of that's okay and you're comfortable with

that, then you just need to tell me now and . . .

KW: Yeah.

SL: Okay, good. That's a great answer. [*Laughter*] And you'll find—uh—very quickly that there are no wrong answers here. This is just us talkin', and—um—I'll—uh—we always start with—uh—the interviewee stating their full name and when and where they were born.

KW: Ah.

[00:02:10] SL: So, Kathy, I need to have your full name.

KW: Kathy Walton. Um—I was born March 20, 1946, in Texarkana, Arkansas.

SL: On the border.

KW: Yeah, right on the border—uh—in fact, it was State Line Hospital.

SL: That's an interesting place, isn't it?

KW: Yeah.

SL: How that border goes right down the middle of the town like that.

KW: Yeah, yeah.

SL: Um—and what were your—uh—parents' names?

KW: Hardy Walton and Helen Lucille Walton. And they are both University of Arkansas graduates.

SL: Is that right?

KW: Yeah.

[00:02:41] SL: What did they do for their living?

KW: Um—I think Dad was the only physics major that particular year from the University of Arkansas. I think it was—uh—hmm—I—maybe 1942.

SL: Mh-hmm.

KW: And Mom got her degree in education.

SL: Okay.

KW: So she was a teacher.

SL: And—uh—did your father—how did your father apply his degree, his physics degree? What did he . . .

KW: He—in—he—um—he first worked for naval research during the war in—in Washington. And—um—they—that group of guys—I mean, he was a ra—he was a radar expert. I think he was considered 4-F, so he wasn't actually called up to go out and serve. So he served stateside.

SL: Mh-hmm.

KW: And—um—they ended calling up—they ended up just putting all the guys in the naval research lab in uniform. They just sort of drafted 'em . . .

SL: Yeah.

KW: . . . all at the same time. And my mother worked for the same—

I think worked at the same place during the war. And then Daddy ended up—um—working for the long—the longest period of time he was working for what became General Dynamics. It started out as Convair and ended up as General Dynamics. He was an aerodyn—aerodynamics engineer.

SL: Uh-huh. And did your . . .

KW: So . . .

SL: . . . mom—uh—end up teaching or . . .

KW: Mh-hmm. She taught in Texas in Fort Worth.

SL: So you had a very—uh—uh—robust—uh—academic and [*KW exhales*] intellectual—uh—home environment, I would assume.

KW: Pretty much. Yeah, yeah. Uh—yeah, Daddy was sort of a—a frustrated inventor and quite eccentric, and so yeah, it was a pretty interesting family life. Yeah.

[00:04:17] SL: And—uh—you attended public schools in Texarkana?

KW: No, we actually—I actually ended up—um—we moved to San Diego pretty quickly. Um—Convair was out there, and then by the time I was six years old—um—we were back in Fort Worth, Texas, and that's basically where I was raised.

SL: Fort Worth.

KW: Mh-hmm.

SL: Um—well, so—uh—let's see, you would've graduated high school

in . . .

KW: [Nineteen] sixty-four.

SL: . . . [19]64. So—uh—that's—uh—quite a interesting—uh—time in United States history.

KW: It was. The Beatles had ju—I—yeah, I—the Beatles, I guess, had just come, and I remember—um—I was on the annual staff in high school and remember making up songs to Beatles tunes and stuff like that for the—sort of going out—uh—or—or the year we graduated.

SL: I [*cell phone dings*] still have Beatlemania. [*Laughter*] Um . . .

KW: It was fun.

SL: So—uh . . .

[00:05:19] KW: And we went through the Cuban Missile Crisis.

SL: Yes.

KW: Uh—carryin'—uh—trunks of bean—uh—trunks—uh—the car—the trunks of our cars were, you know, loaded up with bottles of water and blankets and—and nonperishable food items—um—during—during that time—during the—the Kennedy . . .

SL: Well, yeah.

KW: Yeah.

SL: I mean, it was a real—uh—it was a . . .

KW: We were supposed to be the number four . . .

SL: Target.

KW: . . . target.

SL: So—uh—and what—were you—uh—living there when—uh—Kennedy was assassinated?

KW: Yes. In fact, I was sitting in French class when—um—the new—when the—the principal came over the PA system to tell us that Kennedy had been shot. And just gr—I mean, people sitting in the classroom weeping. Um . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KW: . . . it was something. It was a huge shock, and of course, we were all glued to the televisions after that. [*Sniffs*]

[00:06:19] SL: Yeah. Um—so after you graduated from high school, did you go to a Texas—uh—college?

KW: No, I came straight to the University of Arkansas. I was actually here. Um—well, Mom and Dad had both graduated from here.

SL: Mh-hmm.

KW: And—um—I loved the—we had come up to visit the campus, and I loved the campus, and I loved the trees and everything, and so I was really—uh—and—uh—came up in [19]64—um—was in a sorority for most—you know, we didn't pledge until we were sophomores, and so I was in a sorority for—during my—my undergraduate years.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:07:01] KW: And then just went on into the program in writing. I was takin' workshops from Jim Whitehead and Bill as an undergraduate.

SL: As an undergraduate?

KW: Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, was that kind of unusual? I mean . . .

KW: Hmm, I don't think so. I mean, there were other classes, such as Form and Theory of Fiction and Form and Theory of Poetry, and I was—I was taking poetry classes from Jim. I guess I didn't act—I didn't actually take a poetry workshop from Jim, I don't think.

SL: Mh-hmm.

KW: Um—but I was takin' form and theory courses and—from him, and I can't remember what I took from Bill as an undergraduate, but I think that some undergraduates were takin' workshop because—yeah.

SL: So h—how did you get into the program?

KW: They just let me in. [*Laughter*] They let me in. I was here, and—um—uh—I—I was a pretty facile writer, say that. But—but my years in graduate school, I was best known as being the—the one with writer's block, so I had writer's block most of the time I

was here. And one—I remembered white—Whitehead saying to me at one point—he said, "Well, why don't you just join the poetry workshop? You can not write poetry just as well as you can not write fiction." [*Laughter*] Which I did, you know, but I stuck it out with—with the fiction.

[00:08:29] SL: Were there—were there other women in the program when you were . . .

KW: I think I was the only one. There was one woman I—we were talkin' about that—there was one woman who was there, I think, who was—um—sort of dating Jim McAuley. I'm not sure she was actually in the program. But I think I was the only official—uh—the only student officially en—enrolled that was—the only female at the time. I think it was the second year of the program. Bill and I had been talkin' about that.

SL: Uh-huh.

KW: Um—Barry Hannah—I'm not sure about this. I don't know—I know Bob Ward was in the class ahead of me, and Barry Hannah was either in that same class or—uh—I think he was in that same class. I think I was actually the second wave along with—um—Leon Stokesbury, Ralph Adamo—uh—Sam Gwynn. I'm tryin' to remember some—Johnny Little was . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

KW: . . . a year ahead of me. He was with the Bob Ward group.

SL: Mh-hmm.

KW: They were still very much—uh—central to the program, I think, at the time.

[00:09:37] SL: So—um—you say—uh—you became known as the—uh—as the—uh—uh—candidate that had the writer's block.

KW: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: So how—how did they put up with that? I mean, is . . .

KW: I—well, I would write—I would—they would cajole, and—and you know—um—I would turn in some things that—that, you know, Bill would—Bill would say, "Oh, this is, you know—this isn't really a story. This is just—you know, this is just therapy." And—uh—so I—there were—there were two or three pieces that I would turn in that I knew were not—not so—not so hot. Um—and finally cranked out a—a—a manuscript I guess my last year that—that—that was accepted as a—as a thesis. Um—the very f—very first year I was in the program, I guess I spent a summer feverishly putting together a story that—that—um—oh, I just remember working real hard on that story through the summer and having to stay longer to get the thing finally finished.

SL: Uh—there was—uh—work was expected. I mean, it . . .

KW: Oh, of course.

SL: . . . it was hard work.

KW: Yeah, yeah, and there was nothing scarier than sittin' in front of a blank legal tablet. Um—so I ended up, not surprisingly, being an editor. Um [*SL laughs*]—right [*laughter*]—it's what happens to people who, you know, have writer's block. You turn into an editor, so that's ended up—that's what I ended up doing.

SL: Yeah.

KW: Yeah.

[00:11:19] SL: Well, so—um—give me a—uh—a typical—uh—Bill Harrison—um—experience, either in the classroom or outside the classroom. I mean, there was—I think there was a real blur as to where the program began and where it ended as far as a day-to-day basis.

KW: That's true. I mean—um—it was very much a—a mentor-mentee situation all the time in part because we were—we all had teaching assistantships, or most of us did. That's how we managed to stay in school. Um—and we had a series of courses that was a pretty rigorous program academically. We had to have—sixty-hour degree, and I think at least forty, forty-two of those hours had to be in academic courses, including Claude Faulkner's famous difficult—um—grammar course, which you

had to make an—at least an A minus in that course in order to keep your—or to get a teaching assistantship. Um—so we were just—we were around each other all the time. I remember the professors and the students just hung out together constantly. And those were, of course, the—the—we were starting to—uh—get together antiwar protests and were—we were—all became quite political, and so we were—we would—were—um—artists and—and—and rad—young radicals—not really, not like—anything like the . . .

SL: More activists.

KW: Not—yeah, not anything like on the West Coast, but—um—it was very heady time—uh—ki—uh—exciting time. Um . . .

[00:13:15] SL: What was—you—describe Fayetteville at that time.

KW: [*Sniffs*] I remember an incident—um—ab—this is not—this is sort of a black—a little black—a big black mark on—you know, when—on Fayetteville's history, but it was becoming—politically, it was becoming sort of divided, you know, as the antiwar kids and—um—groups were forming and getting more visible. And I remember there was an incident where some young Black people were work—walking past the Kappa Sig house, and somebody took a shot at 'em. That was a—I remember that. That was a really—I mean, we were—we became all exer—you know, quite

exercised about that. I remember another time having an antiwar march—um—in the streets, and were all supposed to—we were all told to—that we were gonna sit down in the middle of the street, and what nobody told us was they expected the police to come and—um—arrest us for sitting down in the middle of the street. Um—I think I was in the march, but I don't think I sat down. I think we got wind that we were gonna be busted, and we decided we didn't wanna be busted. [00:14:35] I remember—uh—Nixon coming to a football game. And—uh—I remember having—getting a phone bill with some charges—the phone calls to the White House. We were all very—a little paranoid then toward—you know, they were supposed to be charged to the White House, and I had called—I had called up and found this out when I called up the phone company. And so, of course, that made us think we were all on some sort of list, you know.

SL: Big Brother.

KW: Yeah. Some sort of list that they would be using my telephone line or something or tapping my phone line, as if I were in any way in any serious . . .

SL: Threat.

KW: Yeah [*SL laughs*], or even very serious in—in terms of—of—you

know, a very serious political person, for that matter. Wasn't.

SL: Well, you had a—a lot of things goin' on culturally. You had Vietnam War that was unpopular. We had a—a—a guy in a tree on campus. Uh—we had—we still had—um—uh—"Dixie" was still being played at the football games. You still saw Confederate flags running around.

KW: Mh-hmm.

SL: Uh—there was—uh—you know, it's—uh—the divisions were pretty much redneck and hippie 'cause . . .

KW: It was. It was a division between the redneck and hippie, and I believe I was a senior when Martin Luther—yeah, I was a senior undergraduate—uh—when Martin Luther King was shot, and I remember the kinds of tensions and the kinds of discussions we had among the undergraduates. And it was—uh—it was surprising the kinds of emotions that were aroused—um—around those events. And I was in Fayetteville when Bobby Kennedy was shot too. I remember that.

[00:16:25] SL: So—um—give me a—um—give me a good Whitehead story.

KW: Oh. Well, I told you about him sayin' . . .

SL: Yeah.

KW: . . . I oughta be in the ho—poetry workshop.

SL: Yeah.

KW: He was—he—he could usually be found—I mean, we—we had—we had great parties then, and—um—John Little was a—was a good friend of mine then, and he was—he—he lived in a series of really neat houses that I think, according to Merlee, that Gen Whitehead and—and she both first discovered this little house up on Vinson Street. It's a little log house.

SL: Sure, I know that house.

[00:17:06] KW: And I sorta followed John—every time John moved out of one place, he'd say, "Well, I'm movin' outta that place. You want it?" And I would move in. And then when he moved outta that one into the bigger log house on Skyline, I moved into the house on Skyline after he left. And we'd have these wonderful parties and—um—always very passionate arguments in the kitchen and that—and Jim Whitehead was always at the center of them. And they would begin to get—you know, it—it—uh—begin to get loud and passionate and—and political. And—but—and usually it was a—it was about art, though. All those conversations—all those wonderful conversations [*clears throat*] were about art and artists. [*Coughs*] Excuse me, I'm about . . .

SL: It's okay.

KW: [*Coughs and takes a drink*] I hope I don't lose my voice—I've

been having allergy attacks. So [*sniffs*]—and in the classroom, he was the same way. He was—uh—pace up and down the front of the room—uh—talking about—uh—who—who were—I remember studying Theodore Roethke, and who else did we read? Philip Larkin—uh—Alan Dugan [*sniffs and clears throat*]—and he would . . .

[00:18:29] SL: These are—these—these writers were outside the normal English department literature list, right? I mean . . .

KW: Oh yes, they were . . .

SL: And they . . .

KW: . . . because they were contemporary.

SL: Yeah.

KW: They were all alive.

SL: Mh-hmm.

KW: Um—and there used to be jokes about—you know, in the real English Department, they didn't wanna think about anything that was written after [*SL laughs*] 1930 or 1940 at—at best. Um—so yes, these are all conte—and people that would come and visit us—come to the campus. Um—let's see—oh, there were all—a lot of writers who came to visit us. John Clellon Holmes was there for a while. Peter Taylor came. [*Clears throat*] We had some great visiting writers, and it would—made a very rich—you

know, an exciting place to be—and stressful. You know, everybody was always stressed out about something—about getting a job. The bottom—sort of the—people were getting hired out of the M.F.A. program until [*sniffs*] about 1966, and then the bottom sorta fell out for all kinds of liberal arts degrees. I don't remember what the politics were at the time, particularly, but I know that—um—people were scrambling from jobs after about [19]66.

SL: Well, it came out of—um—you went from Kennedy to Nixon for—you know, it's a—and the Southern Strategy . . .

KW: Mmm.

SL: . . . stuff kinda . . .

KW: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . stirred everything—flipped everything around.

[00:19:53s] KW: Yeah. But Whitehead was a wonderful teacher—I mean, and he—he and Bill were both wonderful teachers and very different styles. I mean, Whitehead was lightin' one Camel off the other and [*clears throat*] pacin' [*coughs*] back and forth. This is when all those classes were in Old Main. And we were all smokin'.

SL: Yeah, you could do it then.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:17] KW: Grindin' our cigarettes out on the wooden floor of Old Main. It was—you know, that was a long time ago.

SL: Yeah. Well, didn't—I mean, Jim [*KW sniffs*]—you know, he had this personality where whenever he presented a viewpoint, he personified that he was right, that this was the way it is. And it was like he was baiting people to disagree . . .

KW: To argue.

SL: . . . with him. I mean, it was the argument that—is where all the stuff—the good stuff came out.

KW: Yes.

SL: And it's not so much the dogma, but it was "Give me somethin'," you know . . .

KW: Yes.

SL: . . . to . . .

KW: Yes. And they were—and the—and—well, Bill used to characterize the poets as—you know, the cra—they were the crazy guys, and the [*laughter*] fiction writers were the—sort of the calm, cool guys, and the poets were wild and crazy. So we made that [*laughter*]—we made—and it was—there were some poets—Leon Stokesbury and some other guys there who would get right in there with Jim and be carryin' on in the kitchen. But yeah, that's—the kitchen was the place where all the ideas got

thrown around and argued, and we had a great time. [*Sniffs*]

[00:21:48] SL: Kitchen and the deck out back, right? Wasn't there—didn't they have a deck out back? Didn't Jim and Gen . . .

KW: They did have a little—yeah, they had a patio, but most of the parties I remember were in one of those houses where John Little lived. That's where the student parties were. And the faculty would always come, which was really great.

SL: Which was kind of unusual.

KW: They always came. I mean, we—yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well, but you have to note that they weren't—they're—they weren't that much older than their students. I mean, they were in their thirties, and we were in our twenties, and I think Harold McDuffie and some of 'em were, you know, at least as old as those guys were. But I go back and look at the pictures of Bill then and Jim then, and they were babies. [*SL laughs*] I mean, we were all babies. But they were—you know, they were obviously very accomplished and very wise for their years. And I think that's one of the reasons that there was this sort of volatility between the professors and the students was that they weren't that much older than we. And so there was—they would come to our parties, and they would—we would argue, you know, toe to toe. There wasn't this, you know professor-student

thing like that.

SL: It was more colleague.

KW: Yeah, it was more like colleagues. Exactly.

[00:23:10] SL: Is there a—do you have a kind of a aha moment that you got from, say, Bill? Is there—do you remember a conversation or a moment . . .

KW: Well, I—that—there's—there is that little—he was probably kinder to me—I mean, he being a gentleman, he was probably a little bit kinder to me than he may've been to some of the . . .

SL: Guys.

KW: . . . the guys. Yeah. Because when he got a very slight story from me, his comment at one point—I remember him trying to explain to me—"There are works that are cakes, and then there are cupcakes. [*SL laughs*] This is a cupcake." [*Laughter*] I remember that characterization. And also sayin', you know—but I do remember an aha moment when he read one paragraph that I had written and great praise from him. He said, "That paragraph [*claps hands*] does everything you want a paragraph to do." And that was probably one of my prouder moments in the whole program, was—that was comin' from Bill, you know.

SL: Isn't it amazing that such a little thing . . .

KW: Those little things. Absolutely. But—and it's because I guess

we're [*clears throat*] close enough to bein' writers, anyway, that we remember that those words carry so much weight and that—you know, that words are important.

[00:24:48] SL: What about Jim? Any aha moments with Jim other than the "Come over here and don't write"?

KW: [*Laughter*] "Come over and don't write poetry over here." [*Sighs*] he—I think one of the—what I really learned from Jim is that to be a scholar, to be a writer, to be a teacher, you have to work bloody hard. You have to work hard. And I think that's one of the things that all of us took from Whitehead, is just how energetic and how passionate he was about everything he did. And I guess—yeah, that was—I can't remember specific things except I—you know, I remember him pacin' back and forth in front of that classroom and wonderful moments of basically elucidating lines of poetry—I can't think of specific examples right now, but we would take those poems apart and talk about them in ways that [*sighs*] taught us something about—I mean, what it was to be alive, what it was to be an adult, what it was to be an engaged person, so that the poetry fed that and vice versa.

SL: And I've heard it said that whenever Jim walked into a room, it was like sparks flew.

KW: He—there—he kept his students mad at him half the time—his favorite students. [*Coughs*] The guys that were closest to him. They [*SL laughs*]—Leon Stokesbury used to get mad at him all the time, and it's because he challenged them. It's because he challenged them so much.

SL: You know, it's gotta be a—lookin' back on it, it's gotta be a great compliment that he felt them worthy of the challenge, you know.

KW: Indeed, yeah. Yeah, it was a great compliment to all of us that these guys sort of took us under their wings and—I mean, they really did. I remember a moment when Bill's saying—when I was having—my family was going through a particularly dysfunctional time when I was in my early twenties. And I remember Bill sayin'—you know, look at me and sayin', "We're your family now. We're your family," which was a very—another telling and wonderful moment.

SL: Yeah.

KW: And I knew it. I knew they were. I . . .

[00:27:39] SL: Man, you don't—you know, you just don't hear about that—you don't hear that kind of stuff from your normal college experience.

KW: Hm-mm.

SL: You just—it's . . .

KW: It really was. I—you're right. I mean, and I guess I was so—not used to it, but I was—I—having come from that—I remember going to—my first job was at a small liberal arts college, and I remember going to some of the faculty parties and thinking, "Nobody talks about anything. I mean, where's—isn't anybody gonna talk about anything important or interesting?" And it was just this sort of laid-back, polite chitchat, and I thought, "My God, this is boring, you know. What happened here?" And it was so—I was expecting the same from the other places that I went, and it wasn't the same at all.

[00:28:40] SL: Kind of don't know what you've got till it's gone.

KW: Exactly. Exactly. I—in a way, we knew what we had, but I really was shocked to discover that other aca—you know, in other academic settings with people who are supposedly interested in ideas and interested in art, that the parties were lame. I mean, people didn't talk.

SL: They weren't interested in the risk.

KW: I guess not. And I remember too—even when I was grown and livin' in New York, Ted Solotaroff, who had come to campus to visit, was over for dinner one time, and there was various other poets and writers there. And we talked about books, and we talked about ideas, and I remember him saying that it was so—

you know, he was so delighted to be in such company that would do that because—so even in the larger world—even in the larger literary or publishing world, that didn't happen. So I guess I've been really lucky to be around people that were willing to engage in that.

[00:29:58] SL: Any party stories? Any characters that were just, you know, award winning, I guess, or . . .

KW: Oh, I'm sure I would—we did have some good parties. [*SL laughs*] No, I can't—well, I can't remember any specific incidents. I mean, I know my—yeah, I can't really think of any.

SL: Well . . .

KW: I should be able to, but . . .

SL: Well, maybe somethin' will come to you. What—the program as a whole and in your life—what is it that you took away from the program? How has it really served you? I know that you've [*KW sighs*] done editing—that you're an editor, but what was it about the program that has stuck with you—that has served you?

KW: I guess the ability to really be—I mean, beyond the other things, the ability to really be a good reader—a really good reader. And I don't think everybody is—even—you know, even people who like to read. But they—we—they really taught us that. Jim did,

and so did Bill—how to parse line by line and what the—how a paragraph should end and how—it's—yeah, it's how to read.

SL: I heard someone say that they learned how to see the literature and not just read it—that they could see it.

KW: Exactly.

SL: That they had never seen it before—that they were no longer just reading stuff, but they saw what was going on with the page and the line and the paragraphs. They could see it, and they didn't have that ability until they'd spent some time here.

KW: Yes. They were both masters at that, Jim and Bill both. You know, "What he did do in that? What did he just do there?" or "What did she just do there in that story or that poem?" And it was wonderful. I mean, I—it was wonderful. But yeah, I think that's it. I think that's—it's the ability to read. And it—you know, to take it seriously in the way it should be taken.

[00:33:02] SL: How is it—you know, they're two different guys. How did that work? How could they be so different in the way they approached their work and it—you know, the overall effect was excellence and complete. I mean, how does that happen? Did you—I mean, when you had them together, what was the dynamic that you saw take place between the two of them?

KW: I think it was a reflection of the two different—you know, two

different styles. I mean, Jim would—Bill would always throw in that—sort of the leveling, cool comment that would maybe—you know, once things had—once a conversation or whatever had taken off as far as it could go in one direction, then Bill would sort of pull it back into its—you know, and sort of give a—I don't know, sort of a broader and cooler view of whatever it was. I don't know whether that makes sense or not, but—I mean, they were clearly friends, and they were—there were clearly times when they disagreed with each other about how things should work and what should happen. But they were—I never saw any—you know, I never really saw any disagreements between them, but they were—they both had their styles, and they both appreciated each other's style, I think.

[00:34:39] SL: Yeah, I think—I get a sense that maybe they just counted on each other to have that difference.

KW: Mh-hmm. I think you're right.

SL: And . . .

KW: I think you're right. Yeah.

SL: . . . it wasn't destructive; it was additive in some way—somehow it . . .

KW: And in some ways, the—you know, the fiction workshop was really—I mean, the poets were—went to poetry workshop, the

fictions were in—the fiction writers were in Bill's workshops, but I think the teaching—I think that we learned from those professors outside of the classroom with, for example, the act—you know, the form and theory courses we would take, and so forth, so we would be exposed to both of their teaching styles because we were—had to—we were required to take a—you know, a broad enough range of things—of courses in study and practice of literature that we were able to take classes from both of 'em, whether or not—you know, whether we were fiction writers or poets. But other than that, I mean, they sort of ran their own fiefdoms themselves, and I think they didn't bother each other about poetry workshop or—you know, it didn't . . .

[00:36:03] SL: Didn't mess with each of their own fi . . .

KW: Didn't mess with each other's—yeah.

SL: Yeah.

KW: Fiefdom. No. I call it fiefdom. I shouldn't call it that, but it was, sort of.

SL: Well, yeah.

KW: Yeah.

SL: Mh-hmm. Yeah, I think that was a good line.

KW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. I'd keep that. [*Laughter*] Well, is there anything that

you would—that you wanna say to Bill at this point?

KW: Oh, I just—you know, I wish—yeah. He was a great teacher on—you know, that part of my life or that period of my life will always be one of the most important periods of my life and one of the most memorable. And I think that's probably true for a lot of people. I mean, that—those years—they really stand out as central to, you know, who I am and what I went on to do.

SL: Made you stronger.

KW: Unforgettable.

SL: Made you stronger.

KW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:37:04] SL: Okay, is there anything else you wanna say?

KW: I can't think of anything, but I sure enjoyed this.

SL: Did you? I mean, I hope . . .

KW: I did.

SL: Okay, good, good. Well, these are great guys and . . .

KW: Yes.

SL: . . . it's an incredible program.

KW: Yes.

SL: You know, the lesson is, is that even in Arkansas—even in Fayetteville, Arkansas . . .

KW: It . . .

SL: Good, incredible things are here and there and . . .

[00:37:29] KW: It really was incredible. It was one of the most vigorous programs, I'm sure, in the country, you know. So yeah, the—yeah, it was great. And they brought the rest of the world in. Wasn't—it wasn't at all—it didn't feel at all isolated, and we had people come—really good people comin' in and visiting and being impressed themselves—you know, writers from all over.

SL: And you got to . . .

KW: And we got to meet them.

SL: And party with them.

KW: And party with them. [*SL laughs*] Yes. Yeah.

SL: Which is what people thrive on.

KW: Yes.

SL: They love—they thrive . . .

KW: We did thrive on it.

SL: . . . on those social . . .

KW: Yeah.

SL: . . . experiences. Yeah. Okay.

KW: Okay.

SL: I'm gonna let you off the hook.

KW: Thank you.

[00:38:11 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]