GARY M CLARK

EDUCATION

1957  B.A., Baylor University
      Education

1960  M.A., University of Michigan
      Guidance and Counseling

1967  Ed.D., Vanderbilt University,
      George Peabody College for Teachers

SERVICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Department of Special Education, 1970 – 2008

RETIREMENT

August, 2008

TITLES/RANK

Associate Professor, Department of Special Education, 1970 - 1974
Professor, Department of Special Education, 1974 - 2008
[Beginning conversation on tape is cut off.]

The beginning of the interview conversation started with a comment about the studio we were in at Kansas Audio Reader. I acknowledged that I had been a volunteer reader for KAR for thirty years. Pat Kelly asked what I read.

Clark: “…I read the Kansas City Star live on the Breakfast Table Times broadcast, and then I read the New York Times Magazine for several years. Other years I’ve been a substitute reader for the Breakfast Table Times, regional newspapers, and recorded books.”

Kelly: “I see. Audio Reader is a reading service for the visually handicapped, isn’t that the…”

Clark: “The visually handicapped and print impaired.”

Kelly: “Oh, I wasn’t sure. I knew it was a little more than it was. Anyway, it’s a wonderful, wonderful service, and we are so fortunate to be able to be here. We’re interested in you, where you were born, your parents, your siblings, your wife, your family.”

Clark: “I was born in Crystal City, Texas, a small town in southwest Texas, about forty miles east of the Rio Grande, the border of Mexico and the United States. It’s on the Nueces River. During the Mexican and U.S. War, that was the border that they were fighting over to make sure that the Rio Grande was the border as opposed to the Nueces being the border. It’s north of Laredo and southwest of San Antonio, if that helps you locate it. At that time, it was a town of about 6,000, with eighty to ninety per cent Latino (Hispanic) population, a thriving little town typical of many small towns across South Texas.”

Kelly: “How did you happen to be living there?”
Clark: Well, my parents grew up in that area. Both their parents and grandparents took advantage of land opportunities early on with homesteads and settled in that part of Texas. My father was Dennis Clark, and my mother was Vera Gardner Clark. He grew up in Eagle Pass, Texas and La Pryor, Texas, which are in that area. My mother grew up in Carrizo Springs, which is thirteen miles south of Crystal City, and taught in Crystal City and La Pryor, Texas, about seventeen miles north. It is an interesting little town in that it was a vegetable growing community, and for years was called a winter garden area. In fact, it is still referred to as a winter garden area, which means that they have a growing season twelve months out of the year. So you have vegetables in the winter and spring, and cotton, grain and soybeans in the summer. Del Monte, the California Packing Company, established a plant there shortly after the end of the war, which gave a boost to the economy, but it was already thriving because during the war it was the site of one of the internment camps for people who were born of Italian, German or Japanese parentage. That was unique in that most of the camps were just one nationality or the other, and not just multiple nationalities. They were in operation, I think, for about four years in Crystal City. Anyway, I was born there, I grew up there, I didn’t leave until I left high school to go on to college. I had an older brother, Sammy Neal Clark, and a younger sister, Carole Elaine Clark. My brother went to Texas A&M in Animal Husbandry, and went into the Army and met some people who got him on a different track for his career. He became a missionary, and was a missionary in Latin America for over forty years. In fact, he is still in Latin America doing some ministry, but is in semi-retirement. They live in Mexico. My sister graduated from Baylor University in Speech and Language Therapy, and worked as a Speech and Language Therapist for a few years, and then was a homemaker. She is retired and living in Kerrville, Texas. I’ll talk about going to school later on, but I did continue to live with my parents, as long as they were there, until I left home to go to the Air Force in 1957. So, through college days I was still counting Crystal City as home.”

Kelly: “Was there… do you feel that that particular location, or the people, your parents or whatever, had a particular influence on your career? Was it special for some reason?”
Clark: “I think possibly, although it’s an interesting question. My dad did not finish high school. My mother had one complete year of formal college training, and then an additional year in summer school or whatever it takes in those days for the Normal School of Education so she could get a certificate to teach. Both valued education very much and it was just a foregone conclusion that all three of us would go to college someday. My dad, because of my early penchant for reading and discussions in the family usually beginning with, ‘Yeah, but…’, thought I ought to be a lawyer [Laughter]. He sort of held that as a suggested goal for me for many years. In fact, I was very interested in politics and would go with him down on election night to see the results, and visited once in Austin and went into the Texas House of Representatives chamber, and I picked out my chair [Laughter] and that kind of thing, which he loved. As I began to get through high school, I could see that I didn’t want to go that direction, and teaching seemed like a much more natural thing for me. I identified with several teachers who were such good teachers, and who enjoyed what they were doing and who related well to students, and I thought that’s what I’d like to do. So I began to shift in that direction, and because my mother had been a teacher she certainly could affirm that, but I can still remember my dad saying, ‘There are bigger and better things for my son than being a teacher’. [Laughter] It broke my heart because I saw it as a noble profession. In retrospect, I see it now as someone who, as not having finished high school, was very conscious of how that affects your life financially. I think he saw teachers in our little community having to work second jobs, summer jobs, both parents having to work (at that time the wife didn’t work, frequently). I think he just thought, ‘That’s going be hard for you’. And he was right! [Laughter] He was exactly right. My first teaching job in 1958 paid $3,204 a year…”

Kelly: “Well…”

Clark: “…so he was exactly right. I barely made it financially through the year as a single person.”
Kelly: “Even though money was a lot different than it is now.”

Clark: “Right, exactly. Anyway, they instilled a lot of values for me – whatever I did vocationally, for honesty and integrity, and being proud of my name and reputation and that of the family. Growing up in the church and their guidance, I was very firmly grounded in, I think, good family values. They did well by all three of us.”

Kelly: “Now, when did you meet your wife?”

Clark: “My wife also was from Crystal City. In fact, both of our fathers worked in the post office. I didn’t give my dad’s occupation earlier – he was a postal clerk for, oh, 30 – 35 years. Her dad was a letter carrier and they were in our church. She was five and a half years younger, so she wasn’t in high school with me. She was just sort of a cute little girl that I saw at church and in the community. It wasn’t until I had gone off to college and was in the Air Force and came back home that she was starting to college and had grown up.”

Kelly: [Laughter] “And was even cuter.”

Clark: “Yes, yes. And so we dated a year and she went to her first year of college. She saw that I was much more serious than she was and that she was too young. So, we cooled it for another year and didn’t date. Then she was in my sister’s wedding, and I was there for it, and that got us going again. She finished college in three years. She majored in Elementary Education and taught school for a few years. She was hired to complete the year for a teacher who resigned in Waco, Texas for half a year, and then I was going back to college for my graduate work in Tennessee, and she taught in the Davidson County-Nashville Metropolitan Schools in Nashville, Tennessee for two years as a second grade teacher. She got her Master’s degree at George Peabody College for Teachers while we were there, so she has a Bachelor’s and Master’s in Education. Then later on during our marriage, after the kids were in junior high and high school, she went back to school here at KU and got her Bachelor’s degree in Architecture. So she has
three degrees, with the architecture very different from the teaching. She worked for a firm here in Lawrence and in Kansas City for about five years, and then when she was out in Utah she worked for a non-profit firm that did accessibility planning for people with disabilities. So she did a lot of ramps and retro-fitting of homes for people with disabilities. Since then, she’s done free lance on houses, mainly.”

Kelly: “And then your children?”

Clark: “Yes, we have two children. Austin, our son, was born in 1967, Austin Gary Clark. He went to school here in Lawrence and graduated from Lawrence High School. He wasn’t interested in college, but he did go to Johnson County Community College for a while in the chef’s apprentice training program. He didn’t care for the school part of it but loved the practicum part of it, so he just started working his way up by working in restaurants. He continued that for eight or ten years, working his way up – prep cook, line cook, sous chef, and finally got to be a chef at a hotel. Then he became executive chef at a large hospital in Boise and its satellite in a suburban community of Boise, Idaho, where he managed the food services and patient ordering from their rooms (which he instituted). Then he decided, after having gotten into an avocation which he really loved, making mandolins, that that’s what he wanted to do. So now he is a luthier, an independent luthier, making mandolins and some small guitars. He’s made a couple of violins but he concentrates on mandolins, and is doing very, very well making beautiful, instruments.”

Kelly: “I have a nephew who left the engineering profession to become a luthier.”

Clark: “Really? Well, he loves it, and I think he’s found his niche.”

Kelly: “That’s wonderful. That’s great.”

Clark: “Our daughter, Amanda, also grew up here in Lawrence and graduated from Lawrence High School. She went to Baylor for one year and then transferred back to
The Theatre department wasn’t as good as she had hoped it would be at Baylor and so she came back to pursue her degree in Theatre Arts. She did that here, and played the title role in Gypsy when she was a student. Then, after graduating, she decided with a Theatre Arts major and English, that she didn’t get many job offers, [Laughter] so she went to K-State and got her teaching credentials there. That’s also where her boyfriend was, Reid Börk, who is the son of Jean Shepard – who is Judge Jean Shepard – and John Börk, who was with the Kansas Attorney General’s Office in Topeka, both from Lawrence. Amanda and Reid both took teaching jobs in Fort Worth, Texas after he finished his degree, and taught there…she taught in the Ft. Worth School District and the Castleberry School District and he taught four years, then went back for his M.B.A. at the University of Texas at Austin. Amanda put her teaching on hold when the first child came. In terms of grandchildren, Austin has one son, Lucas Clark. Then Amanda and Reid have three children – Eli Börk, Caroline Joy Börk, and Owen Gary Börk.”

Kelly: “Oh, boy. Now, as I remember, a lot of your retirement time is now pretty busy with those three.”

Clark: “Absolutely. They are back here in Lawrence. They moved from Fort Worth a year ago in July, and so we have spent a lot of time with them since they got back – good times, both at our house with meals together, and sometimes babysitting, and sometimes doing things together.”

Kelly: “Oh, that’s wonderful. That’s great. Well, you have a wonderful family life.”

Clark: “Yes.”

Kelly: “You’re blessed with that. What about religion, friends, philosophy, things like that?”
Clark: “Both of us grew up Southern Baptists, and stayed with the Baptist church through the time that we were in Nashville and my first job in Illinois. Things began to change in the Southern Baptist convention at that time and we could not seem to find a Southern Baptist church that really fit our style of worship and theology. We attended the Methodist church here for a while, and then joined Plymouth Congregational Church, I think in 1972, and have been members there ever since. I am a lifelong Democrat, and I would say my philosophy is basically one of optimism for life and hope for the future. I guess I would say I have more concern for people who are unfortunate, and that’s one of the reasons that I find myself more comfortable in the Democratic party than the Republican party. I value what people can do – both non-governmental as well as governmental services for people who are poor, have disabilities, elderly. And so I view life as a time to get it right in terms of how you treat people around you. That sort of plays out in my career choice, I think, working with people with disabilities, preparing teachers for people who will work with children with disabilities. As I said, I am optimistic about the future. I get discouraged at times, but I’ve found that that’s the way with life – you have your times when you think, ‘This is just not working’, and then you work through that black funky period and things come up again. You wait for those times and ride the good times and get what you can get done, and weather the storms in the other times.”

Kelly: “That’s wonderful. You know, it’s been in the paper recently that Eunice Shriver just recently died. What was she, eighty-eight?”

Clark: “Eighty-eight.”

Kelly: “We talked about this the other day, but would you…”

Clark: “Yeah. She was a magnificent person in terms of her contributions to the field of disabilities because of her own personal experience of her sister having developmental disabilities, but also her family values of working for people who have problems and special needs. She certainly spent a lot of money, which she had in her family, and took
advantage of her intellect and energy to work on behalf of people with disabilities in a way that hasn’t been matched by many people. I got to hear her when I was in graduate school at George Peabody College for Teachers in about 1968 or 1969 and was inspired by her and what she was doing at that time for Special Olympics, but also other kinds of ways of educating the public about what we need to be doing, and how we’ve mistreated people with disabilities because of our attitudes and misconceptions and the myths. I was very impressed with a film that she helped produce and narrated, very early on, about a young teenage girl who had mild mental retardation. I used it in classes for a long time, even after it began to look old, because it was so powerful and people (our students) needed to see her and they needed to get that message because it was a timely message even ten, fifteen years later.”

Kelly: “Right. And we know that the Kansas Director of Special Olympics is a Lawrence boy,…”

Clark: “Yes, he is.”

Kelly: “…Christopher Hahn, whose father was on the Music faculty, Marcus Hahn, and his mother Sydney taught piano lessons. One of my sons took piano from Sydney. But that is such a special time, and the comments of her [Shriver’s] children that spoke at the funeral made her sound like she was quite a girl.”

Clark: “Yes, she was. She would not back down from anyone.” [Laughter]

Kelly: “Of course, with a family like that behind you it’s a little easier to be very, very positive.”

Clark: “Yes, yes.”

Kelly: “We talked about your retirement time because a lot of it is going to be enjoying these grandchildren. But you, I believe, are just about as active in all the other things, as
you obviously have been all your life. It wore me out just reading all those things you’ve
done.”

Clark: “In some ways, you know, I was looking forward to just quiet time to read (one of
my favorite hobbies) and look at some things that I might do as interests and pursuits in
retirement. So we’ll see whether I pursue anything in relation to theatre or music, my
other interests, along those lines. Certainly I am taking advantage of going to events in
the community much more than I did before. I don’t have so many things on my ‘To Do’
list.”

Kelly: “Did you get to the Convocation?”

Clark: “No. When I retired from KU, I pretty much cut the cord from doing that. But
it’s interesting when I thought about it, you know; I never went to one of those because I
always felt like I was too busy getting ready for the school year to go when I was on the
faculty. Maybe I should go now.”

Kelly: “I didn’t get there either, but I understand that there was a good crowd, and the
people I’ve talked with were very impressed with our new Chancellor, who is Bernadette
Gray-Little. Right?”

Clark: “Right.”

Kelly: “I understand she is already being referred to as BGL.”

Clark: “BGL… [Laughter]

Kelly: “Well, that is quite a bit to say every time, especially if you’re referring to her
frequently in a conversation or something. So you’ve done a lot of traveling.”
Clark: “We have. In my career I was able to take advantage of several wonderful opportunities for travel. The family got to join me on several of those, and my wife on a number of them, particularly after the kids left home. We spent eight weeks in Central America in 1971, and three weeks in Europe in 1972. I’ve been to Korea and Taiwan. My wife and I went to South Africa. She and I both went to British Columbia in Canada and Nova Scotia in Canada (two conferences). Then there were various trips seeing the United States, in parts that we’ve not been to before. It afforded me an opportunity to visit nearly… I think forty-eight states, I think. I haven’t been to Hawaii or Alaska.” [Laughter]

Kelly: “Those are two very interesting ones. You will want to pick those up.”

Clark: “Right. But, yes, that is something we hope to do some of in retirement, and we hope that the economy gets better so that that’s possible.”

Kelly: “You were talking about cutting the cord, but are you still involved in any consulting and that sort of thing?”

Clark: “Yes, in fact I leave Sunday morning to go to Richmond, Virginia to do a one-day workshop. So I continue to work with state departments and school districts doing staff development or teacher workshops, primarily in the area of assessment of students with disabilities and planning for their futures. I’m doing some consulting work on keeping updated the website of the Iowa State Department of Education Transition Assessment Model. So I’m staying busy… I will be going to the Division on Career Development Conference in October in Savannah, and doing a pre-conference workshop with two colleagues there. There is also going to be some kind of honoring of me there.”

Kelly: “Now this is where?”
Clark: “In Savannah, at the Division on Career Development for Transition Conference, which is a division of the Council for Exceptional Children, a national organization for people who work as professionals in education.”

Kelly: “You’ve been involved with that for some time, haven’t you?”

Clark: “Yes, I’ve been involved with that since it was founded. I was a charter member of it. I think it’s… they are celebrating the thirty-fifth anniversary of the organization. The Council for Exceptional Children is much older than that, but this division… I was a charter member of that. So, yes, I am tapering off by continuing to work on some assessment instruments and publications that relate to assessment, through a publishing company in Texas, and a colleague that I work with there, Dr. James Patton.”

Kelly: “You’ve worked with him a lot, I notice, in your publications and all, that he is often a co-author… you write and have connections with him. Where is he?”

Clark: “Yes. He is in Austin, Texas. He is a full time consultant himself, but he does adjunct teaching at the University of Texas at Austin. Just because he still loves to teach, so…”

Kelly: “Well, it would be a terrible shame, just because you retired, that we lose you out of this field.”

Clark: “In fact, I’ll be doing a guest discussion leader for one of our online courses this fall, here at KU. So, I haven’t completely cut the cord, but I’m not a full time member of the faculty anymore so I try to look at myself in that way.”

Kelly: “You can pick and choose…”

Clark: “I can pick and choose.”
Kelly: “…whether you want to do something. That’s always very nice, isn’t it?”

Clark: “Yeah.”

Kelly: “Are there times about… what was happening on the hill in the ’70s? Let’s see, you came in 1970.”

Clark: “Yes, correct. As you remember, 1968 through 1972 were really rough, rough times in the country. The civil rights issues, the Vietnam protests, the cultural revolution in terms of women’s liberation, the sexual revolution, and all the things that brought about changes in values and behavior and dress, relationships between young people and parents, and relationships with adults. It was interesting but scary during those years. As I left the University of Illinois, where I was before I came to KU, there were protests there as well, and it was beginning to get very hot. I remember getting a call from one of our doctoral students to come and help him get out of jail – get bail, [Laughter] because he and a large number of students who had been at a protest rally had been gathered up. I thought, ‘You know, this is not good, and I am hoping I go to a more peaceful place when I change my career location’. [Laughter] I had not been told anything about what was happening when I was at KU in February of ’70 for the interviews (I came in August), about some of the things that were going on in Lawrence [Laughter]. Evidently, that spring is when it really peaked, in terms of the end of school ending up with no exams given, and the fire bombing at the Union. That summer two people were shot and killed here in Lawrence. It was really a worrisome time, and as I recall, one of the things that my wife and I had to talk about: ‘Am I in the right profession?’ When I came home saying, ‘We’ve been asked, or told, that we need to volunteer (volunteer!) [Laughter] or sign up for a fire watch at Bailey Hall. That was very sobering. We lived in a time and a place, a university of all places, where you had to watch out for fires being set and people wanting to do malicious acts of vandalism and harm to the university in the name of protest. So, again it was like one of the things that I mentioned earlier – that was one of those dark, funky times that there was little as an individual you could do about it except to try to maintain a positive view and continue to communicate with students to let them
know you cared, you were listening. Sure enough, over time, things began to ease up and
level off. I think part of that was not only the times changed but some of those students
left school and graduated and moved on. New students came on who didn’t identify with
that so much, and they wanted a new KU for themselves, and a new Chancellor came
along pretty quickly. So things really did begin to shift in a very positive way. I think, as
far as I have been concerned, it’s been downhill ever since in terms of ease of teaching
and relationships and political climate. It’s not always been downhill in terms of having
to deal with no pay raises, or very, very small pay raises. When your wife isn’t working
and you are the sole breadwinner, it made a difference. You’d start thinking, ‘Well,
maybe I should look elsewhere’, you know, because I can…”

Kelly: “Maybe your dad was right.” [Laughter]

Clark: “Maybe my dad was right, even at the college level. [Laughter] I came here in
’70 at a salary of $14,000. That was about… I think when I left Illinois I was making
$10,900. So it was a substantial raise for me but still not very much money; but to me, it
was a major leap. While I had been at Illinois, I was very discouraged with what I was
making there, and the only way you could get a raise at the University of Illinois was to
get a matching offer. You go get an offer somewhere and bring it back, and they say,
‘Okay, we’ll pay you that to keep you here’. I was so angry at that policy that I just said,
‘No, to heck with you. If I’m not worth that to you now then I’m not going to enhance
that policy by going along with it’. So I left, but one of my mentors there, a senior
faculty member who was a very well known man in the field of Special Education, the
reason I went to the University of Illinois, Dr. Sam Kirk, took me to lunch one day as a
new faculty member, and he said, ‘Don’t be discouraged, Gary. Someday you’ll be
making $30,000 a year’. [Laughter] And I was thinking, ‘No way will I ever, ever be
making that much money teaching college’. [Laughter] So it’s all relative, isn’t it?”

Kelly: “Yeah. That’s interesting, how it grows.”
Clark: “Yeah, yeah, but it’s been good here. The School of Education has had some good leadership, for the most part. We really kicked in, in our department, when the law was passed requiring schools to provide services for students with disabilities. It not only swelled our enrollment because teachers then were needed to teach a large number of students who hadn’t been provided for before, and it made an exciting time for us to gear up for our programs and write grants to get programmatic funds to really make these quality programs. We were able to do that through the leadership of Dick Whelan and Ed Meyen. Particularly during those early years we really made major strides, and moved KU from a position of narrow national recognition to an expanded recognition. We were seen mainly as behavior modification proponents, mainly because of the people at that time who were in the old Human Development and Family Life department, who were quite well known across the nation as experts in the area of behavior analysis and behavior modification procedures. KU, as a Special Ed. department, didn’t have that much of a reputation. So it moved us from that to where we were, really by the mid-’80s, as being one of the leaders in the country, and then quickly moving into a leadership role – No. 1 and No. 2 nationally ranked, which we have consistently held, even through this last ranking period. So you can’t feel badly about a time and a place where those things are happening and you can be a part of it. We were encouraged to be creative, be entrepreneurial, be innovative; at the same time, we were encouraged to be very sensitive to students and what they needed, and be good teacher educators and not just researchers. I think the blend of doing research that would feed into our teaching, and doing teaching that gave us ideas for doing more and better research has worked here.”

Kelly: “Well, good. I noticed a reference to Gordon Alley in your awards or something.”

Clark: “Yes, Gordon Alley and I came the same year. In fact, it was interesting because there was one position open, and we were both candidates. I didn’t know this until later, but they couldn’t decide between us, we were so different in what we would bring, and yet they liked both things. So, Dick Whelan went to Dale Scannell, who was the Dean at the time, and made a case for hiring both of us.” [Laughter]
Kelly: “Oh, for heaven’s sake!”

Clark: “So we were both brought in as Associate Professors, which was quite a coup, to get not only an extra position, but both of us as Associates instead of just Assistants.”

Kelly: “Yes, right.”

Clark: “He and I were especially bonded because of that coming in together, learning the ropes together. He was interested basically in the same things I was, which made sense, particularly adolescents and young adults. He went one way in learning disabilities (the position had been mental retardation, which was kind of interesting), but that was okay because some of the things that were happening in learning disabilities made his unique skills very relevant. I stayed in mental retardation for a while, and then they did away with that as a program area, so I was just more generic or general across all disabilities. He had a brief but very productive career until his accident and then became disabled and had to take disability retirement.”

Kelly: “I didn’t know him but I know his wife. When he was hit by that car on his mo-ped, trying to save gas coming to work, I thought it was my husband. It was a tragic, tragic accident.”

Clark: “He was honored with an award in his name by what is now the Center for Research on Learning, the old Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities. The Institute created this award in his name called the Gordon Alley Partnership Award. People outside of the Institute who worked with them or collaborated with them on research or activities were considered Partners. There was a time when I was working with them on a research project that I had.”

Kelly: “Great. Well, I just thought that was so interesting, and I couldn’t figure out what the partnership had meant. Do you think that outside impacts had a… “
Clark: “Yes, I think… you know, we’ve been affected negatively and positively on outside impacts. One, of course, is funding. Negative impact would be when the State would decrease its amount of support to the university. I’m talking about support, not just for faculty salaries, but in every way. It can’t help but keep you from being able to do some of the extra things you would like to do, and be even more innovative and freed up to do some extra things. So those things have had some negative impacts; but, on the positive way, it has forced us to go for grants that enabled us to not only get money to support students and additional support staff or project staff, but it helps enhance the reputation of the university in terms of name recognition with grant success. We’ve been very good at that whole competitive process of writing grants for research and training. In addition to that, an outside impact has been legislation, and I mentioned that earlier. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 through the Americans with Disabilities Act, and continuing re-authorizations and amendments of those have kept us on our toes because we had to change our practices to do even more and better kinds of things to meet the provisions of the law. We don’t see it so much as a ‘Have-To’, as some people do. We see it as we ‘Get-To’ do something we know we should be doing, and then we have some teeth behind what we’re saying is the right thing to do. That has had major, major impact, I think. Governmental support of people entering our field for undergraduate training, master’s training, and doctoral training has had a major impact on our department and our field for a long time. In fact, my doctoral training was funded by funds coming out of the early funding that went into higher education to achieve this. This legislation was the result of the Kennedy impact and some of the early legislation for making monies available to help people be more prepared to work with people with disabilities. As a recipient, and as a person who has managed and been able to coordinate funding for others, I’ve seen the benefit of this. I have no problem paying my taxes because I say, ‘My money is going for that’. [Laughter] I can say to myself, ‘My money is going to fund professionals in special education, and national parks, and national highway systems that I think are good’. Now that I am under Medicare, [Laughter] I can say, ‘My money is going to fund a very good health care program’. This is, again, part of
my philosophy, that I see the bright side of the way things are as opposed to the down side.”

Kelly: “Well, I can see that you do because you smile a lot, and that’s so nice for everyone around. A smile goes a long way, doesn’t it? Do you think the University of Kansas Department of Special Education is on the right track? Are there things that you’d like to see changed, or…”

Clark: “I think our department is on the right track, I think our School of Education is on the right track, but the problem is that we’re aging out. Those of us who have made the department what it is as a national ranking are getting old. Two of us recently retired, but in the last five years that would be four of us, and if you count back eight years that would be six of us, have gone. We’ve got six more right on the cusp of being thinking about and eligible to retire, and our department can’t stand that kind of a major change of immediately shifting to Assistant Professors and expecting to maintain a No. 1 ranking. That just doesn’t come from new people who are working hard to learn everything. As an example, the State has had to freeze positions, and so the two of us that retired plus a third faculty member (I didn’t mention her as a retirement because she left to go into private consulting), that’s three people whose positions are not being filled. They are not even available to our department for a search. It’s just like we are expected to fill that gap some other way. That’s going to take its toll on our department. While I think the School of Education as a whole isn’t so top-heavy with older, more mature senior faculty, it has its share, and so they will be feeling it also in the next five years, I think.”

Kelly: “And it does take time, no matter how bright some newcomer is, it takes time to establish the reputation, to be invited to the conferences and the things where you make a difference.”

Clark: “Right, right.”

Kelly: “So, what are your hopes?”
Clark: “Well, my hopes are that the State can be more able soon to make the commitment that it needs to make. I know it’s… it came as a very strange thought to me early on in the 1970s that the State’s income was so dependent on the wheat farmers and the wheat and soybeans sales. The kind of economy that we have in Kansas makes it an up and down economy. So I know they are trying to do the best they can. Public schools are affected very negatively, and higher education is also. Public schools don’t have what universities have, the alternative of going… well, they can a little bit… going for grants, supplemental grants. But the universities are being forced more and more to do just that. I think it siphons off energy and effort and time from doing what needs to be done, when you have to do that. So I think it’s going to be difficult for a few years for the university to get back where it would like to be. In terms of national rankings, I think we’ve slipped, but part of that comes from having to compete with the people who are going for research grants to supplement with a pool of money that’s much more restricted and much more competitive. When there’s a lot of money, then we can be in the hunt. When there’s not, then we’re competing with the Harvards, Vanderbilts, and the Stanfords and the… “

Kelly: “… and the Dog Eat Dogs.”

Clark: “Yes, Dog Eat Dogs. We really do find it difficult to compete as a university, I think, across the board with a lot of the major private schools that get large contributions and endowments. We’re in competition with the public universities which is a more fair comparison, but even there, states that are more stable economically can continue to do better and still compete while we are struggling with having to do more for less.”

Kelly: “It is rather normal, I believe, though, that all across the country states are contributing lesser and lesser percentages to university budgets. Correct?”

Clark: “That is correct.”
Kelly: “What is it, about fifteen percent or something like that?”

Clark: “Yes. I had heard fourteen the last time, so it’s in that ball park, which, you know…”

Kelly: “That’s another…”

Clark: “Yeah.”

Kelly: “And especially if they want to wag the dog.”

Clark: “Yes, that’s right. That’s right.”

Kelly: “That wasn’t very good.”

Clark: [Laughter] “Well, it is. The legislators who feel frustrated that they can’t maybe control more of what’s going on at the university in terms of direction and programs find it easier to do when they are contributing more. But on the other hand, I don’t think that’s why they do it, so they can call the shots more. On the other hand, the less they are able to commit from the State, it certainly gives less of an impact on what it is we end up doing because we are having to hustle to find what we can. That takes us in directions that sometimes may not be in the direct interests of the needs of the people of Kansas. I think that the Cancer Center Research Institute is a good example, something that we really can see the benefit of that. But some kinds of research, just specifically, space contracts that we get for the space program – you know, that’s fine and dandy but that doesn’t help the wheat farmers in Kansas.”

Kelly: “‘What have you done for me lately?’”
Clark: “Right. The kinds of things that we do – my assessments for kids with disabilities, for example – do not resonate with anybody except parents of exceptional children.”

Kelly: “Right. We have, of course, wonderful follow-up on your career and your publications and all of the many, many, many things that you have been involved with. I don’t know, you must have met yourself going and coming all these years.”

Clark: “At times I felt that way.”

Kelly: “But anyway, that will be added on to here. Are there any other thoughts that you have?”

Clark: “I would just say I leave KU on a very happy, satisfied note. I would encourage any young faculty member to come here. It’s been a good place.”

Kelly: “Well, that’s great. Thank you so much, Gary. It has been fascinating.”

Clark: “It has been a pleasure, Pat.”

Kelly: “It’s so nice to meet you.”