

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT MINOR

Interviewer: Jewell Willhite

Oral History Project

Endacott Society

University of Kansas

ROBERT MINOR

B.A., Biblical Studies, Trinity College, Deerfield, IL, 1967

M.A., Biblical Studies, Trinity Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 1969

Ph.D., History of Religions, University of Iowa, 1975

Service at the University of Kansas

Began teaching at KU in the Department of Religious Studies, 1977

Associate professor of Religious Studies, 1981

Professor of Religious Studies (1988-2002)

Chair of Religious Studies, 1988-1994

Acting director, Center for East Asian Studies

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Q: I am speaking with Robert Minor, who will retire in July 2002 as professor of religious studies at the University of Kansas. We are in Lawrence, Kansas, on March 5, 2000.

Where were you born and in what year?

A: I was born Oct. 2, 1945 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Q: What were your parents' names?

A: Carl and Alice Minor.

Q: What was your parents' educational background?

A: Neither one of them had a college education.

Q: What was your father's occupation?

A: He was a draftsman for Allis Chalmers.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: Yes, I have two sisters and a brother.

Q: Did you grow up in Milwaukee?

A: Yes.

Q: What elementary school did you attend?

A: I attended first Parkway Elementary School in West Allis, which is a suburb of Milwaukee, and then I attended Irving Elementary School through the eighth grade.

Q: Did you join organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Y, that sort of thing?

A: I joined the Cub Scouts. I didn't join the Boy Scouts. I didn't find them helpful.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

A: High school began in ninth grade and I went four years to Nathan Hale in West Allis.

Q: Was that a fairly large school?

A: About 1,000 students. West Allis, as in Allis Chalmers, is a working class suburb of Milwaukee. That was the headquarters of Allis Chalmers at that time. Since then it has closed and been bought out by Seamans and laid off everyone.

Q: What were some of your favorite classes?

A: I was interested more in the sciences. Chemistry was my favorite class, also the social sciences. I liked physics as well.

Q: Do you remember influential teachers or other influential people from that time?

A: There were two influential teachers. One was a Mrs. Cavanaugh, who was in English. The other one was Mr. Shear, who was in chemistry.

Q: Were you involved in extracurricular activities?

A: I was in the Audiovisual Club. I was in band.

Q: What did you play?

A: I played the clarinet.

Q: So did I.

A: I was in the National Honor Society and the Future Teachers of America..

Q: So you knew you wanted to be a teacher, even back then?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: That's unusual for someone to know that early.

A: I thought I wanted to be a chemistry teacher.

Q: Did you have summer jobs?

A: I didn't until my last year in high school. Then I was a bus boy at a restaurant called the Tyrolean Town House.

Q: Was it always assumed that you would go to college?

A: That was the goal of my family. Since they were working class people, they were

hoping all four of their children would go to college, because they saw it as a means to rise up in the class system in America.

Q: Did you go to college in the fall after you graduated from high school?

A: Yes, I went to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, which was in town. I got a couple scholarships. My parents couldn't afford to help me. They didn't help me through college at all. So the first year I went to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I commuted and stayed at home. Then I decided I didn't want to go into chemistry. I wanted to go into religion, so I went to a school called Trinity College in Deerfield, Illinois, and I moved there. I got a job while I was going to school working for the College in the admissions department.

Q: How did you happen to become interested in religious studies? Had you been active in the church as a young man?

A: I was off and on active. My parents encouraged it but not extremely. They were not active. But I had a good sociology teacher and the section on sociology and religion was very interesting.

Q: Did you finish your undergraduate work at Trinity College?

A: I did my bachelor's there in Biblical Studies, which is the closest thing they had to religion. Then I got a master's at Trinity Seminary, which is also there, in Biblical Studies.

Q: Is this seminary connected with a particular church?

A: It is connected with the Evangelical Free Church, and since I've left it has become closer tied to it.

Q: Do you remember influential teachers from that college?

A: Yes, he was a history teacher, Howard Voss. He was the most influential of the faculty.

Q: Were you living in a dorm then?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you involved in extracurricular activities?

A: I was editor of the student newspaper for three years.

Q: That's quite a big job in addition to going to school.

A: Yes.

Q: Was this a small school?

A: I'm guessing it was about 800 students, maybe 1,000, maybe as many as 1,500.

Q: Did you have honors?

A: No, I don't think I did.

Q: You said you went on to get your master's.

A: I got an M.A. in Biblical Studies from the Divinity School.

Q: Did you write a thesis for your master's?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: What was it on?

A: It was a study of a passage in the New Testament Book of Hebrews. I suggested a new interpretation.

Q: I guess I need to get these dates. When did you graduate with a bachelor's?

A: 1967.

Q: And your master's?

A: 1969.

Q: This would have been the time when there was a lot of unrest here. Was any of that going on in the school that you were going to?

A: There wasn't a lot of unrest, because the students were pretty conservative. But the

newspaper, which I edited, was a more liberal wing of the school. We were anti-Vietnam War. Most of the student body was not, so they thought we were pretty liberal. We weren't very liberal, but in that context it seemed like we were.

Q: When you finished your master's, did you go directly on to your doctorate?

A: I went on for my doctorate at the University of Iowa. It was the fall of 1969, where I would be until I completed my doctorate in 1975.

Q: Were there protests and anti-war things going on at the University of Iowa?

A: Yes. And I participated. I was anti-war.

Q: When you say you participated, do you mean you wrote articles for a student paper?

A: No, I was in marches. They had marches and they had riots. Police were brought in to break it up. Well, it wasn't really riots, it was demonstrations. They wanted to get people off the streets, so they had to bring in the police and the highway patrol

Q: Did you get arrested?

A: I didn't. I wish I had. It was a colorful part of my career now when I look back.

Q: What was your major as a doctoral student?

A: I began in New Testament and I lost interest in it. So I switched over to religion in South Asia, the history of religions in South Asia.

Q: How did you become interested in that? You had never been to South Asia, had you?

A: No, I had never been to South Asia. I began because I was interested in methodology, the issues around how to study religion. I had gone to the University of Iowa because it was a state school. I wanted to study religion in a state school situation, not in a parochial situation. There was a very good person there in methodology named Robert Baird, who is my close friend now. In fact, I just came back from a conference in Dallas, in which we roomed together. We are very close friends. He was my advisor at

the time. I went to him after the first year I was there in the summer at his home and said I'd like to major in methodology. He said, "Well, you can get your doctorate in methodology, but no one wants to hire someone who just knows how to do it. They want to hire someone who does something and knows how to do it." So at that time you could choose India, China Japan. His field was modern India, so I chose modern India to work with him.

Q: In working on your doctorate, did you go to India?

A: I didn't go to India until after I was done.

Q: What was your dissertation on?

A: My dissertation was called, "The Ethics of Sri Aurobindo Ghose: A Religio-Historical Study." He is a modern Indian Hindu religious thinker. I was interested in his thought. I didn't really need to go to India. In fact, I have his complete works. I'm giving them to the Moore Reading Room. I didn't need to go to India to do that. Actually, I didn't go to India until 1981. I taught a couple years before I went.

Q: Were you teaching as a graduate student?

A: I had a graduate teaching assistantship first in a course called "Religion and Human Culture" for two years. Then for two years I was a graduate teaching assistant in a course called "Civilizations of Asia." That was being developed in what was then the East Asian Languages Department at Iowa. They were changing it to an Asian because they wanted to include South Asia. At the time they didn't have someone to do the lectures on India. They did India, China and Japan. So I actually did the lectures on India for a large section, as well as taught some discussion sections. It was a good opportunity to do that. During the last two years I taught part-time in a school called Marycrest College in Davenport, Iowa, which is a Catholic school. I taught a course in

world religions.

Q: Was that near Iowa City?

A: It was an hour's drive.

Q: So you both taught there and were finishing up your dissertation.

A: Right.

Q: Did you stay there after you graduated?

A: No. Actually, I took my first job in the fall of 1975 at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. I was assistant professor of religious studies. I was responsible for teaching India, China, and Japan, Islam, Post-Biblical Judaism, Religion in Africa, and Method and Theory.

Q: That must have been a lot to keep up with.

A: That's right. I was the person who didn't do the Christian stuff.

Q: How long were you there?

A: I was there two years. It was a non-tenure track position because at that time Allegheny College had a rule that a department could not be 100 percent tenured. And I came in late. I was the only one not tenured. It was clear that I would not be able to be around that long because people weren't going to die or anything. I couldn't stay there. It was a good experience and I would have loved to stay there.

Q: Was that a fairly small school?

A: It was 1,800.

Q: Where did you go after that?

A: In 1977 I applied at three places. One was the University of Kansas. On that date the School of Religion was going to give up teaching religion. It was being taken over by the College of Liberal Arts as a department of the College. They had not had a full-time

Asianist. So I was the first position they added, a full-time Asianist in the fall of 1977.

Q: What were you teaching?

A: At that time the teaching load was three courses a semester, which is very heavy. Now it is two and two. But it was three and three. I picked up a course, Introduction to World Religions. I probably developed a couple courses. I taught a course in mysticism. I taught a course in whatever. I can't remember what they were because I sort of developed them along the way.

Q: I was going to ask about any courses you developed.

A: I really changed the nature of courses in Asian studies. I eventually dropped the World Religions course. I changed the course to Living Religions of the East. It used to be called Introduction to World Religions. We had courses added in Religion in India, Religion in China, Religion in Japan. I taught both East and South Asia. I taught mysticism, special topics courses. The second year I was here I began to teach Approaches to the Study of Religion, which was the methods course for the department. I took that over someone who had left.

Q: Is that a study of how you study religions?

A: Right. I did special topics courses along the way. One year I did a special topics evening course on Gandhi, when the Gandhi movie came out.

Q: What have been your research interests while you have been here?

A: My research interests were in modern India and modern Indian thought and how it relates to tradition. So I began with getting my dissertation published. Then I began to look back at an Indian scripture called the *Bhagavadgita*, which is used very much by the modern thinkers.

Q: Is this Hindu scripture?

A: It's Hindu from about 150 B.C.E. That's where I dated it. So I went back and wrote a commentary on the *Bhagavadgita*. Then the next thing I had an NEA sponsored conference here called Modern Indian Interpreters of the *Bhagavadgita*, for which I wrote a couple of essays. A book came out of that. Then I went back to the modern period with a fellow named Radhakrishnan, who was president of India and a philosopher. My most recent book came out in 1999. It's a study of the religious movement that rose out of the first person I studied, Sri Aurobindo, their development of a city in India and how it was eventually taken over by the government. So it was a study of India as a secular state and how it links religion.

Q: You were saying in the early 80s you went to India for the first time.

A: In 1981 I went to India.

Q: How did that come about?

A: I got a grant from the American Institute of Indian Studies, because I hadn't been there. KU never committed itself to India. South Asia was left to Kansas State. KU had committed itself to East Asia. So having somebody in Religion, you can't do that. You have to have Hinduism and Buddhism covered. Religion is a naturally international field, whereas in the Philosophy Department, all the philosophers study Western thought. No one studies Eastern philosophy. So when they talk about "the history of philosophy" it means Western and usually male, usually northern European white male. But in religion you can't do that. You can't study religion without studying Hinduism. So I was hired. At that time there were two other support people. There was Keith Percival in Classics who taught Sanskrit as a support and there was Alphonso Verdu in philosophy, who was a Buddhist philosopher. Since both of those people have retired, their departments have replaced them with people who study more white males. So, in a

sense, one of the things that happened is that I watched my support people leave. I was the only one, and I was not supported by those other departments. They wanted to hire people who studied white males. So when Alphonso Verdu left, philosophy hired somebody who studies Hiedegger. When Keith Percival retired they didn't hire someone to do Sanskrit.

Q: Sanskrit is the language of what?

A: Ancient India. It is an Indo-European language directly cognate with Latin and Greek. So in classical studies and in linguistics you really need to know Sanskrit.

Q: So now they do not have a Sanskrit person.

A: Right. So that sort of undermined my ability to have graduate students and undergraduates.

Q: What did you think of India the first time you went?

A: I really liked it. I love the people. I had culture shock, but it wasn't really around the poverty. It was more around the sensory overload. But I liked it.

Q: Were you studying at a university there?

A: I was studying by myself in Madras, India. I was doing a number of projects, reading for researching a biography of Radhakrishnan that I was going to do. Really a lot of the books that came out started in that process. I was attached to the University of Madras, but I wasn't really there. I was studying archival material all around and traveling around.

Q: That must have been fascinating.

A: It was a wonderful experience.

Q: You were talking about some of your publications. You've written several books.

A: Five books and lots and lots of articles.

Q: Do you want to mention the titles of your books?

A: The first one was called *Sri Aurobindo, the Perfect and the Good*. It was published both in the United States and in India.

Q: Was that the one that was based on your doctoral dissertation?

A: Yes. That was quoted by the Supreme Court of India in one of their cases. I was quoted as an expert witness. The second book was called *The Bhagavadgita, an Exegetical Commentary*. It was published simultaneously in both the United States and India. I was the editor and contributor of *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavadgita*. It was published in the United States and has subsequently been republished in India. The fourth book is called *Radhakrishnan, A Religious Biography*. It is about another modern Indian thinker, an important one, who was also president of India for a while. The last one is called *The Religious, the Spiritual, and the Secular: Auroville and Secular India*. That came out in 1999. It is sort of my last piece on India and ended my study of India because I have been moving into gender studies since then, religion and gender studies. That's kind of where my interests have fallen.

Q: What sort of things do you study, how religion affects gender?

A: It defines gender issues. I teach a course called Religious Perspectives on Selfhood and Sexuality. I took that over from Professor Zimdars Swartz. She didn't want to teach it any more. So I said, "Let's have a man teach it." She was glad to. It talks about how religion defines what it is to be human, what it is to be a man, what it is to be a woman, what sexuality is, etc. I teach that from a multicultural perspective.

Q: You mean Buddhist and Christian?

A: Hindu, Buddhist and Christian are the three we look at. That's become a popular course.

- Q: Yes, I suppose, with feminist issues and things like that.
- A: Right. And that's where my research has gone recently. So I did a couple of things on that in India. Now I've kind of moved into it more generally.
- Q: Have you had other sabbaticals in addition to this trip to India?
- A: Yes, I've had at least two sabbaticals here.
- Q: Was that trip to India a sabbatical?
- A: That was just a leave.
- Q: Where did you go on your sabbaticals?
- A: One sabbatical I went to India and one sabbatical I stayed here. Then the department gave me a teaching adjustment one year while I was chair, so that I was able to not teach one semester and work on writing toward the book that eventually came out, the last book. I've been to India since, in the summers for four shorter periods.
- Q: You work in the libraries there on your books.
- A: Yes.
- Q: Have you seen a lot of changes in India in the times that you've gone there?
- A: Yes, it has become much more Westernized, much more polluted.
- Q: More crowded, I suppose, or is that possible?
- A: In parts of India it is more crowded. Many more Western things in India replacing or sitting side by side with things that are unique to India. I like India's differences and uniqueness, the serendipity about being in India. You can see anything there if you watch carefully. I like that about India.
- Q: Now the religion you were studying in India was primarily Hindu.
- A: Yes.
- Q: That has a lot of different gods, doesn't it?

A: It does, depending on the type of Hindu you are talking to. There are different types of Hinduism, so it depends who you talk to. There are a lot of different gods worshiped.

Q: You had administrative responsibilities here too, didn't you?

A: I was chair of the department from 1988 to 1994, for six years. That was my major administrative responsibility. But I was director of graduate studies before that and director of faculty development after that. I was chair for six years and did my best to try to help the department and learn about the system. I became quite disappointed in how the university does things. That was not a helpful experience for me. I had had enough by the time the six years were done. I did two three-year terms.

Q: It's a lot of work. My husband was department chair for a while too.

A: It wasn't so much the work. That's even gotten worse. There is more assessment, more accountability. It was the lack of rewards for the work done. I'm not talking about me, I'm talking about my faculty. I pressed very hard for the improvement of religious studies salaries. We are the bottom. We are at the bottom of the humanities. We would always get the answer that we were the hardest working department in terms of research output and student FTEs and stuff and we were still the cheapest. One dean said, "You are a real model department." I resented that. We would be called the hardest working and we would be paid the worst and that would be a model. I told the dean, "How am I supposed to understand that?"

Q: Why do you suppose that is?

A: They would say priorities. Religious Studies is not a priority. In the 20 some years that I've been here we have such a topnotch faculty. We have our own building. We have an endowment that is bigger than anybody in the humanities. We have faculty who are known internationally, every single one of them. And yet this could have been a real

jewel for the university. But the university chose to put it in departments that they believe function less. I leave with a sense of disappointment. The university began with this commitment under Bob Cobb as dean to have this religion department and make it something good and then just pulled the plug from it. When I came in 1977 we were the only Religious Studies Department in the Big Eight. Oklahoma State had one, but it was a small one. Since that time, while we were suffering, Colorado added one and added a master's degree and surpassed us. Missouri added one and added a master's degree. I expected more when I came here. The great disappointment is that this could really have been the jewel of the university. This really could have been a department to be proud of, but I feel that the university did not support it.

Q: Do you have a lot of students taking courses in this department who are not Religious Studies majors?

A: Yes. Our principle courses are closed. Many of our courses are closed after the initial preregistration. We've never had a problem getting students. Our basic problem is that we haven't had enough faculty to serve the students we have.

Q: You said there was a problem with having graduate students because you don't have some languages taught.

A: For me, that became a problem because the support people I had were not replaced.

Q: Does this department offer master's and doctorate degrees?

A: Just master's. We've been encouraged to look at a doctoral program, but we don't see that we have the resources to do that. That would require quite a bit of resources put into the department and I don't believe the university has that kind of commitment. They don't have the kind of commitment to keep a master's program. In my retirement, I may not be replaced. I'll be lucky to be replaced. That's one full-time person who's

been here since 1977. I'm really disappointed in this university.

Q: Will they be lacking a person in Asian studies when you go?

A: We do have a person in East Asian studies but they will be lacking a person in South Asian studies. They have these intentions of hiring, but again, we'll see. It goes into a major pot which is sort of lusted after. Now we can use this for computer science or something. So it is a disappointment. It is a major disappointment for me that the university has not done what it could have done with this department. We are not an expensive department, so they could have done it with a lot fewer resources. We have a really good faculty. I have no colleague who is not a hard worker. There is no politics in this department. This is a department that has always worked closely together. And yet it has not been rewarded. And every study shows that. We just had a self study done last year. The outside people came in and they said, "Sure enough, your salaries are at the bottom of the humanities. The University of Kansas pays poorly. The humanities are the poorest paid and we are the bottom of that. That's a disappointment. I leave with disappointment. I don't regret my job here. I basically stayed here because I was divorced and I kept my son. Had I left the state, I might have lost custody of my son. So that was the reason I stayed. It wasn't because of the salary. This is a great department. These are great colleagues in this department. I want to be clear about that. The answer is, "We had priorities." Well, that means we are just low priority. I know where I am on the priority system. I am low priority to this university. And I've lived with that.

Q: I guess I forgot to ask you, when were you married?

A: I was married in 1970 and divorced in 1983.

Q: And you had a son. What is his name?

A: His name is Matt. He is 22 years old and he is at Pittsburg State. I had custody of him and I didn't want to lose that. So I couldn't really take offers. I stayed here not because of the University but because of my son. I don't regret that.

Q: When you were chairman of the department was there anything particular going on, new projects started?

A: We did everything we were supposed to do. We had a long-range goal, we had a hiring goal, we had process goals. It was just not supported above us. The only progress we made was we did hire an East Asian Studies person, so I then could do just my stuff and not have to do all of Asia.

Q: That would be a lot to keep up with I would think.

A: And I did it well. I was also acting director for the Center for East Asian Studies for a year. So I did East Asian stuff well, even though I was not an East Asianist.

Q: What does the Center for East Asian Studies do? Is that located in another department?

A: It is separate. It is located in Lippencott Hall. It is a center for bringing together all the Asian studies programs, getting grant money. There is a Department of Education grant. It's a national center. It was a lot to keep up with, but I did. And remember I started with a three and three load and was still producing books. Eventually Dean Lineberry talked us down to a three/two load. All the time I was chair I taught two and two. I didn't realize I would only have to teach one and one. So I taught two extra courses for six years. So I feel like I've done my job. The chairs now only teach one course a semester.

Q: You must have found these Indian religions very fascinating and meaningful to study.

A: They are fascinating. I enjoy what I do.

Q: There seem to be a lot of people worldwide involved in those. In fact, in the United

States they seem to be growing, some kinds of Zen, etc.

A: That's right. Because we have more Indians here and we have more interest in it, it is growing.

Q: Do you have foreign students in this department?

A: We do in courses. I have Indian students taking my courses to find out about their religion. They know as little about their religion as we do about ours.

Q: That's interesting.

A: I read somewhere that you were a member of a values panel for the Kansas City Star which worked to identify values to teach the next generation.

Q: In 1994 the Kansas City Star wanted to identify 12 values, one for each month, that would be values that we would teach to the next generation. They wanted to do a year-long project. They called it the Raising Kansas City Project. It was kind of a response to "Let's get the 10 commandments back in the school." What can we say? They looked for a diverse panel, and I was on that panel. It was good to meet in Kansas City with this variety of people and try to hammer out the values and compromise and then sort of define them.

Q: That would be difficult to come to a consensus about, I suppose.

A: I made what my definitions of each of them were and put them forth for people.

Q: Do you remember what some of the top ones were?

A: Compassion, tolerance. Love of learning was one that they had and I needed to know more about that. I think children start with a love of learning and the danger is we take it out of them. Kind of a connection to the planet and other people. I can't remember all of them. It was a good series and I was quoted a lot.

Q: I think I have seen some newspaper clippings, maybe the Kansan, that indicate you are

interested in gender roles, homosexuality, things like that.

A: That's part of the religious perspective on self and sexuality, that those issues are key issues. They are certainly issues to be looked at today, and religion says a lot about them.

Q: Fred Phelps, for instance?

A: What it is to be a man, what it is to be a woman, what the woman's place is, what the man's place is, those kinds of things religion has talked about.

Q: And religion tends to define those for people.

A: It has been a definer. Most often it sort of defines them to approve what the culture is doing. It hasn't really often been a leader in these issues. It is trying to support what is going on in the culture more than it has been prophetic.

Q: Have you had awards?

A: Depends on how you define them. I have never received a teaching award here. I don't think I do the kind of teaching that would be rewarded. The biggest award I've ever gotten, I think, is the recent article in the Kansan about my retirement. About a month ago they had a front page picture in the Kansan and a story. They don't do that with most faculty. I've not seen that before. So that was probably the highest honor, that the students would consider my retirement a story and put a color picture on the front page of the Kansan. My books have been well reviewed. I was honored last year by GLAAD, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, a national organization, with their annual leadership award in education, which is a real honor, because that is a national organization.

Q: Is this because of courses you have taught or something you had written?

A: Workshops I do. I do a lot of workshops now for churches and religious groups on

diversity, particularly around gay issues.

Q: Tying to promote more tolerance, I suppose.

A: Trying to deal with homophobia and more tolerance.

Q: I see that you have some kind of award on your wall.

A: I'm a member of the U.S. Attorney for Kansas "Communities Against Hate Crimes Task Force." This is a certificate I got after the first year for the state of Kansas. We are meeting Thursday again.

Q: What do you do against hate crimes?

A: Well, we meet and get evidence of what's going on in Kansas. Of course, there are many, many hate crimes in Kansas, most of which don't get reported, for a wide variety of groups, the NAACP, all sorts of people. Now we are making proposals to the U.S. attorney, whose very good at this, Jackie Williams from Wichita. We advise a little bit. It has taken us about a year to get to the stage of proposing educational and other programs to deal with this. This is in response to attorney general Janet Reno's call for this kind of task force in every district. I'm really proud to be a part of that, as something that goes beyond the university and serves Kansas. I got that certificate just last December after the first year of service.

Q: I read somewhere that you are a member of Phi Beta Delta.

A: Yes, it is an international honor society.

Q: I assume you have been on university or department committees.

A: I have been on SenEx, University Council, the Athletic Board, a wide variety of committees. I'm not a committee person, so I don't relish that type of thing. But I have been there, done that. I get to see what's going on.

Q: You belong to professional organizations, I suppose.

A: I belong to the American Academy of Religion, which is the religious professors' organization, The Association for Asian Studies, which is the Asian studies organization. The Association for the Study of Religion, which is another organization. Those are the major ones I belong to.

Q: Have you held offices in any of these?

A: I haven't. I've done sort of minor offices. I have been on steering committees for small groups and section chair for the Asian section in the region. I haven't aspired to that. I like to teach and do research. Chair of the department was as high as I wanted to go.

Q: Are there outstanding former students you've known who have gone on to greater things?

A: I've been very selective of the graduates students I've had. I've had some students who have gone on who I am really proud of, gone on to doctoral programs elsewhere. They are either in those programs now or are teaching professors.

Q: What sort of jobs do your graduate students get? Are they primarily college teaching?

A: Mine are. Sometimes we do have people who come back to do graduate work for sort of self-improvement too.

Q: Any other community activities?

A: I was on the Board for years of a men's center in Kansas City. I'm on the board for the Center for World Religious Experience and Study in Kansas City, which is an interfaith organization. Those are the things I've been on boards of. Otherwise, I've just done grunt work in organizations. I've worked with Simply Equal on their materials on religion, worked with various men's organizations. I've worked with Women Take Back the Night. I do the men's circle for that each year.

Q: That's an organization of people who want to be safe, isn't it?

A: It meets down at South Park. It is women who are trying to empower themselves to make

themselves safe from violence against women. I do some training around gender issues for Headquarters counselors. I do a variety of things like that. I do a lot of teaching of workshops and speaking.

Q: You are retiring fairly early.

A: I will be 55 October 2. I will retire in July of 2002.

Q: I think I read that you are writing a column.

A: I write a monthly column called "Minor Details" for a gay and lesbian magazine that comes out of Wichita called The Liberty Press. What it is is sort of a column that's goal is to put a perspective, kind of a healing perspective on the issues of the day that relate to gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender people. It really has an intention of talking about a new perspective from my research on public issues. It has been very popular. It gets a lot of readers who are not gay and lesbian. Parents will tell me, "I am sending this to my heterosexual son." I talk about the nature of romance and how it is misunderstood and a lot of things that I get from my broad reading in gender and sexuality issues.

That's popular and very well received. I am currently writing a book called *Scared Straight: Why It's so Hard to Accept Gay People and Why It's so Hard to be Human*.

That's nearing completion. That will be my first popular book.

Q: That sounds like an interesting topic.

A: People who have read the manuscript so far really are encouraging.

Q: You've talked about this a little bit, but I always ask at the end about your assessment of your department or KU, past, present, hopes for the future or anything else you'd like to add in that regard.

A: I will leave KU with both good and bad feelings. I will leave KU as a good experience. I feel as if I've really done my job here and done it well. I am disappointed about the

lack of rewards this department received. I was more vocal about that when I was department chair because that was my job. I hear all the arguments that are given and it just means we are not a priority. I consider my experience a good experience. I don't know what the future of KU will be. I don't like the direction of the university into more private funding, the strong emphasis on grant getting. I think it is dangerous for the university, how much grant money you bring in rather than what you produce and how it is perceived by one's peers.

Q: I suppose the grants are necessary because the state is not that generous.

A: Right. I think that is the lack of support from the state. I think the university is very hierarchical and has too many layers of administration, compared to other universities. I was struck by our outside reviewer saying how many rules we have compared to other universities. We are so rule oriented. I love my colleagues. There is not a better group of people than the faculty in this department. I go away and will miss them very much. But I don't know if I'll miss the university. I'm not bitter, it is just sort of a realism. When I figured out what my retirement income would be as opposed to my salary, I was kind of glad I wasn't being paid too much, because I don't really have to take a big cut. If I had been paid what other people in my position had been paid at other universities like us, it would have been a tough decision. So retirement was a lot easier. I always did want to retire early. I did not believe that I would go into complete old age doing this, not because it was bad. I did it very well. I enjoyed every minute. I would not do it differently.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add that I've forgotten to add?

A: I can't think of anything.

Q: Thank you very much.

