5-19-1989

Hemenway, Stephen I Oral History Interview: History of the Hope College English Department

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Interview with Stephen Hemenway
by Christine Modey
May 19, 1989

CM: When did you come to Holland?

CM: So you have been here for 17 years now. What brought you?
SH: Job offer.

CM: Where had you been teaching before? Had you been teaching?
SH: I had taught since 1964 in Jamaica at a mission school for a year, at Boston College where I got my Master's, in India at Panjab University where I was on a Fulbright grant, and at University of Illinois where I was doing my Ph.D. work. So I came directly from the Ph.D. program at the University of Illinois here. So this was my first full-time tenure-track position.

CM: Do you feel like you're going to stay here until _________?
SH: Hard to tell. I never plan more then a few days in advance.

CM: Except for in Vienna, well even then... (laughs)
SH: Well, even then. I guess I plan about a year ahead at most things. I am not one who makes five-year plans and ten-year plans.

CM: That's a good thing. What did you think of the department when you got here? What sort of sense of atmosphere was it?
SH: The thing that impressed me most, I think, was that there were so many people who seemed more interested in teaching than in other aspects of being an English professor. That was something that I was more interested in, so I felt a sense of unity...
with people whom I had just met under interview circumstances. There was an enthusiasm which they had, which I enjoyed. Plus, there was also a respect for scholarship. I had brought several chapters of my dissertation, and they were earlier chapters that had been re-written, and re-written, and they were, I think, pretty good. People seemed to like what I was doing at that level as well. Different people liking different aspects of what I could bring to the college—I liked that. Not just an emphasis on one facet. The people seemed very friendly and eager when they talked with me...because I didn't really know much about the school.

CM: Was that sort of atmosphere about teaching different from where you had gone to graduate school?

SH: Certainly at University of Illinois where the professors were pretty much lecturing from worn-out notes, but were very good when commenting on your papers, because many of them were more scholars. But I found most of them, not all of them, very dull in the classroom. That was opposed to what I had experienced at Boston College where in the Master's program I was extremely enthused by the teaching quality of the graduate professors. I thought the Boston College program was much more exciting and much more rigid than the Ph.D. program at the University of Illinois.

CM: Would you say that the teaching is ________________ in all the departments?

SH: I don't know about all of the departments. I think in English especially, probably more so than several departments. At least there are a lot of people who are very consciously interested in what they are doing in the classroom and talk about it. They are constantly being put on school-wide committees that deal with teacher
enhancement and evaluation. I think the subject matter helps a lot. I think it’s probably something about the nature of the kind of person who would go into English teaching as opposed to physics or modern dance or something else that involves more. Not to demean those other fields at all. There is just a more direct involvement through literature with situations, people, and characters that relate to the students.

CM: Your style of teaching in the classroom seems different from all the other teachers. Where does that come from?

SH: I probably don’t know a lot of other teachers’ styles. I think I have observed a lot of bad teachers over the years, and consciously try not to do what they do. I like experimentation. I like innovation. A lot depends on the group of students. I have two back-to-back classes with World Lit I, and one can be as free flowing and as exciting, inventive, and creative because of the chemistry between the students and me. And I try to do the same thing with the next class the hour later, and it totally bombs because of the make-up of the class. You can never anticipate that just because something worked once it will work again. I think you have to be very flexible in a classroom. If you go in with this great idea for this superb discussion, and it turns out that no one has read the stuff, you could walk out of the classroom, but I wouldn’t do that. You could get very irate, but I wouldn’t do that. I might let people know I was disappointed, but then I would lecture. I would get material across that I hoped to do that day; I would never give up on it, and never have either. Sometimes you have, particularly in freshman English, absolutely superb classes that after the first week it’s just so much fun being in the classroom with them. There is so much
learning going on; everybody likes each other, it's not work at all—it is just pleasure. And other times you get a group that no matter what you do, they just look at you and seem bored or whatever. I don't think I have ever given up even on a group like that. There are always some people in a group like that who are probably as upset as I might be with the rest of the class, so at least you can work with them; you can try little things, and I do that. I find that the challenge of teaching; you have to adjust a lot of what you do in your style, your methods, to the individual group; otherwise you just write the group off as not that interested. I think every group can be interested; you just have to pull it out. Sometimes it takes longer with one group than with another. So I try a lot of things.

CM: What is your philosophy behind the non-paper writing? You're one of them, there are a couple of teachers I know who do that.

SH: Actually, there are a lot more who do it now then ever did before. I feel partly responsible for better or for worse. I had taught drama courses at University of Illinois, and one of the things that I encouraged people to do there was to do costume designs, stage settings—this sort of thing. Scenes from plays in class. This involved other non-writing kinds of assignments, and they seemed to work very well. Not very many people did them, but just enough to get people excited about them. I remember talking about that when I interviewed for the job here, and people seemed kind of excited that I was trying to involve the whole person in some of these things. I did it pretty much from the start. I honestly don't remember if I did it the first semester. I could go back and find my syllabus from that time and see if it was on there, but I
know I did it second semester because there are a couple of things in this office that are from my second semester, 1973.

CM: Like which one?

SH: This one particularly, and another one I just brought home. But this one is based on Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark" and is probably one of the very first non-papers. The reason I pushed it...I pushed it first of all in World Literature classes because I realized it was a core requirement, and back in those days people might have done both World Lit I and World Lit II; I am not sure. But I thought there were a lot of students who had much to offer, but got panic-stricken with lots of papers and tests, and expressed themselves in other ways as well. So why not utilize musical talents, artistic talents, dramatic talents, abilities even to cook. In those days, food was cheaper. I had huge World Lit dinners for 70 people at my house. The people would make things and be graded on them. People seemed to like the idea; in fact at one point, one of the assignments was that you had to do something along these lines, but then I got so many bad collages of things that I decided that I would leave it as an option. But people always seemed to respond very well. I extended it to other classes as well. I don't do it in all of my courses; it depends on the nature of the subject. But I find that it is good psychologically for the students; even some of them who are very good writers do these things, too, just as a break. English majors, for example, doing core courses and just doing nothing but churning out papers. It is kind of nice to do something with your hands and create a sculpture that typifies whatever you just read about. But I found people generally spent far more time on these projects than
they did on something they were writing. They were far more interested in them. Besides they are hard to grade because I am not an expert in art and music, and so the grades may tend to be a little bit higher. I think sometimes because you can tell the amount of work that goes into something, and that can be a compensating factor. But for somebody who is doing just basic C work in the course with test and papers, to do something like that that helps to bring up the grade; it keeps the interest and prevents discouragement. I find that for the most part the other people in the class are very supportive and responsive. I think I noticed in your class...were you in the second or the first one that I did in World Lit? I did two in a row last semester in the fall.

CM: I was in the 1:30.

SH: I think it was the 12:30 class that was...I can’t remember. The first class was extremely responsive to things--in fact, they jumped up and down. The people did.

CM: Not my class. (laughs)

SH: It wasn’t your class, no. You were in the class with Brian ________?

CM: Oh, yeah I was.

SH: Was he in that one? Oh, but maybe it was the other class. I think he dominated that one. Yeah, I think it was the other class. There were like 15 people that you could count on to say something everyday. It was just electric. And they would just applaud for each other and that sort of thing. It was really great, very supportive. We had a Japanese student in one of the classes who did projects, and obviously her writing ability was not as good as that of most Americans, and to get that kind of support, it was very good for her to have to explain what she did. It was great. So I
find that there are a lot of positive reasons for doing it. I know other teachers have
done it. My goal always is that it is not supposed to be some easy way out of doing a
paper. It is not an alternative to a test. Some people mistake it for that.

CM: One of the things that is interesting and I think distinctive about you in the department
is your background with Catholicism as opposed to I think everybody else. No?

SH: No, Bill Reynolds is also a Catholic.

CM: Okay; that's right. But coming from the east and a Catholic background, what did
you find at Hope? Did they ____________?

SH: Yes and no. One thing I was surprised at: I expected, just because of what we hear
as Catholics that Protestants read the Bible so much more than we supposedly do, that
I would come and find that Hope students were so familiar with the Bible that I had to
be very careful the way I was teaching because they would always be quoting things,
and they would recognize sources. I remember teaching the Book of Job the first
semester and really being so nervous; I had never taught it before. Everyone in the
class was going to know more than I did about this. And I found, I don't think
anyone in the class had ever read it. Even when we came to a lot of literature that
was based on Christianity, medieval literature particularly, I found that Hope students
really knew very little about the Bible. That was a misconception that I had, that
supposedly everybody here was very well-versed in religion. I found that, basically,
Hope students can quote St. Paul, and that's about it. They don't know the gospels
that well, which was kind of a relief. I am not somebody who pushes religion in all
the classrooms. I get discussions going on religious matters. I was very careful about
not really revealing where I came from religiously. I am not sure exactly why. There is still a lot of hostility towards Catholics, so when I came I had parents say to me, "What religion are you?" and "Oh, one of those," when I responded. I know of students I had in class who were on special committees or boards talking about hiring policies who made statements that the school had to be very careful that they never got Catholic teachers. Once another student on the board--in this particular group I am thinking of--asked this woman who was a senior who her favorite teachers were at Hope College, and she mentioned me first. And he said, "Don't you realize he is a Catholic?" She was stunned. You know this sort of thing, but she was coming from the idea that if you're Catholic you have to be bad and, therefore, you can't be at this school. I have had somebody sit in this office with me practically in tears--a senior whom I had from freshman year in a couple of classes--who said she knew I was Catholic and begged me to be born again and be converted to whatever her brand of Protestantism was so that I could be in heaven with her, because obviously I wasn't going to be if I continued to be Catholic. Now those things may sound extreme; they don't happen that often, but they do happen. The faculty people when I first came here approached me with, "Oh, we would love to have you come for dessert on Sunday night," and I said, "That would be great." "Why don't you come a little early and we will take you to our church. You probably haven't picked one yet, and we will show you what it is like." And I said, "Well, I am Catholic..." "Well, never mind." So you wouldn't get dessert if you didn't fit in. That kind of stuff I can mostly laugh at. I have heard a lot of comments from other students who have told
me things that when other students find out that I am Catholic they are very stunned, or they are very surprised. Probably because I don’t push any kind of religious-interpretation requirements in the classroom. Some people seem very affected by it negatively, but it doesn’t surprise me that they are. So, it is interesting in that sense. When I do something like Dante, well, I think in your class last semester, somebody point blank, who knew I was Catholic, said, "You're Catholic; what about this?" I could even sense this feeling among some people in the class--this is two-thirds of the way through a course--going, "Oh, wow, he is teaching us this stuff," that kind of thing. I never tried to hide it at all, I just felt I could be more effective as an advisor and counselor for students if I was quiet about my religion since Catholicism seemed to threaten a lot of Hope students, and they were very comfortable with me without knowing that, that to push it or belabor it would make me less effective in my role as an advisor and counselor. In early years, too, I would bump into a lot of students at St. Francis on Sundays, but for the last ten years my church is on the northside, and I live on the northside, and that’s where I go, so very seldom do I encounter Hope students at church unless I’m in town. It’s always a surprise when they see me on the altar doing the readings on Sunday. I think for the Catholic students, now that there are well more than 300 on campus, that it is important for them to know that there are Catholic teachers on campus, and there are quite a few who are practicing Catholics. Even just in case there are specific problems, doubts, whatever. Because some of these students I have talked with feel very persecuted at times by other Hope students because of their religious beliefs. But I have never felt any pressure from the school
to conform to any particular kind of religious ideology. I have never had any official complaints that somehow I didn't typify someone's idea of what the Christian teacher should be. I had a student who did a test alternative refuse to write about some of the works because he said that the writers were non-Christian, and therefore they didn't count. He called them non-Christian because they were Catholic, or might have been Catholic, like Shakespeare and Cervantes. It was that last period of World Lit I, but you have to deal with that stuff--the Hope student who does consider Catholics non-Christian. That is something that comes up over and over again. I just have to laugh or snicker at it. It's humorous, but to some people it is a real hostility because of what they've been taught. Catholics do this in other ways whereas other people would say that about Jewish people, or Blacks, or Hispanics. It does continue to come up, but it is never threatening.

CM: It seems like the attitudes of the students need to change.

SH: The students are far more conservative religiously and politically than the faculty.

CM: Would you say that has changed over the years you have been there? Were they more liberal in the early '70s than they are now?

SH: Well, good question. They were far more liberal politically; well, maybe they were only like 85% total Republican as opposed to 95% today. But there was more concern with social issues. But these were Vietnam war years; these were civil rights years. There were a lot of very active Hope students. They may not have represented the average, but there were a lot of them there, and that almost totally disappeared in the late '70s and early '80s. It is interesting that I think it is
reappearing now. One begins to wonder if the 20 year-olds today were born in 1969, and their parents are all part of the protest generation, maybe you know, you always think their kids revolted against their liberal parents and became Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and all of that. Maybe something of that is rubbing off. In the last year or two, I see a great deal of social activism. When I say a great deal...

CM: A little more...

SH: A lot more than there was two, three years ago among Hope students. People writing seriously about things and questioning their values and prodding other students to do that. I think that is where the prodding has to come; we can be devil's advocates in classes, but there is only so much of that you can do without coming across as a phony. People are going to sense, "Oh, well, he's just doing this." That is why I like trying a lot of different techniques.

CM: You said that the faculty is a lot less conservative than the students. Particularly in this department, you found no prejudice or little prejudice against these kinds as far as accepting something?

SH: I could label a comment something here or there, but I think it would be taking something in isolation. If someone has criticized me on religious grounds in this department, then it has been behind my back, and it hasn't come to me because...pretty much total acceptance. I have also made an effort, too, because I knew very little about the Reformed Church. I have subscribed to, well, we get it free, but I subscribed to The Church Herald since I came. We don't automatically get it free; you have to sign each year if you want it. There is another journal,
Perspectives, that is a more literary kind of journal, for more intellectual Reformed Church members. And I look at those very carefully because I’ve learned an awful lot about the backgrounds of many of my students because of reading in there. A lot of them belong to these churches, have careers in these churches, and part of it is like reading alumni news or something. But they are just theological where they are coming from. I have been able to see where there are points that I might differ with, or I can see where they might just have a good laugh at Catholicism because of a certain stance on something. I think just reading these things has helped me to appreciate some of the problems that Catholicism is going through with regard to perhaps an even tougher stance with regard to women in the church. You know this sort of thing. You get to know that other groups are struggling with these issues and the kind of excuses that they come up with and all of that. I think there are similar problems in both church groups and obvious differences, too. But I don’t think the differences are really stressed. I’m telling you partly as somebody who has taught in a mission school in Jamaica and in Chandigarh, India, and there are a lot of Reformed Churches in India. I have an understanding of the mission field, the pluses and the minuses there that allows me to look at these things with some objectivity.

CM: I am also somebody from the east, and I have noticed a lot of differences between the east and midwest. What have you noticed from your background? You grew up around Boston?

SH: About 40 miles west of it.

CM: …and then coming here. The students...the way that they, apart from ___________?
SH: They are definitely more conservative politically. A lot of it depends, too, because my background is a fairly lower-class, Catholic, grammar school, high school where 10% of us went on to college. Most people got married immediately after high school and still live in the area. So, in that sense, I came from a fairly conservative background, but it was certainly more Democratic than Republican, but because people were working-class people. I am sure very narrow-minded religiously because a lot of people probably had not questioned things which they learned as Catholics. So religiously, we might be very similar to the kind of student that Hope gets.

Politically, no. Where I went to college, I was a definite misfit. For one thing, I lived in town, which made me 1% of the student body that were called day hops. And, at a school that literally turned down thousands of people, in my freshman class of 500, 175 of us were class valedictorians. You are accustomed to being number one, and now you’re not even in the top third anymore, and you were the class valedictorian. But most of those people were from very well-to-do prep schools, and they had a lot of money; they were very successful. I had nothing in common with a lot of those people. I think Hope students are very wealthy, for the most part. In college, I came across students who were probably wealthier, but of course today it’s probably $7000 a year more in tuition than Hope. So it does attract a very wealthy clientele. I didn’t fit it that way. It is ironic when I talk about it because in many ways the people I went to college with were wealthier and had a lot more experience because they had traveled and done a lot of things than the Hope students today. And yet my situation, basically the hometown boy who lived at home all during college and
worked everyday, was a very different kind of experience. I would be similar to the Hispanic student who goes to Hope College and works and doesn't quite fit in and realizes that I am not the typical student at this college. So in that sense, I probably relate more to the Hope student who really has to work during the school year, and has to work in the summer, and the kid who really wants to go to Vienna but will never be able to afford it, or will have to go after graduation because no matter how much you try to keep costs down you still need money to do these things. I realize how valuable a program like that could be for somebody. I wish I had been able to do something like that when I was in college. So it is hard to pinpoint differences. I was in a situation which was quite different from most people who were in my situation. I feel very comfortable here in the midwest, but then I felt very comfortable in Jamaica. I felt very comfortable in India. I feel very comfortable in Vienna, except my German isn't very good. I adapt pretty easily to places if there are people there whom I enjoy. I was asked in my interview before I came here--it was the pre-interview in Chicago by someone you know and are studying under right now--how do you think someone like yourself who had (because of my India experience, and I was writing a dissertation that dealt with India) a lot of background in Indian philosophy and religions from the East would fit into a small, liberal arts college in the midwest? I responded that I had gone to a small, Christian grammar school; small, Christian high school; I had gone to a small, Christian college; I had taught in a small, Christian mission field; and even though it was a different branch of Christianity, I didn't think I would have a problem at all.
CM: Do you notice any academic or intellectual differences between east and west?

SH: There was a more intense intellectual interest, and I think there still is in the east. But I think that can be overrated. I think there has been a real watering down of intellectual standards everywhere in colleges. I worry that even though we have some outstanding students at Hope College, I think we often have to gear our courses towards students who are going to get by with a bare minimum. I see Hope in the last few years becoming more and more of a party school. And it is not just sororities, fraternities, doing that at all. People who put the blame at their door are very incorrect, and they don't know what's going on at this school, but I kind of do. You don't want to discourage people, but on the other hand it is fairly easy to get a C in a course without putting forth a lot of work, and I think that is uniform throughout the school. It is hard to know exactly what to do about it, but I don't like to see grades cheapened. I am still fairly stingy with A grades, but not with B grades. You don't want to become a machine. I don't take attendance or things like that. I'd rather have people there really interested in talking--not everyday; you can't expect that; it is too much pressure on them. I would rather see more people excited about learning rather than just finishing the course.

CM: I wonder if you see the idea of the English department as a service department sort of? One that every student is going to take at least two courses in. If that is a problem, that sort of lowers the standards of the English department or compromises it.

SH: It's a good observation. It probably at least compromises the standards. Some people
think that we should be even more of a service department. Offer far more writing courses. Most of us got our degrees in literature, not in writing. You expect at a small college that you will be doing writing courses, but I think that one reason it makes it hard for people to do a lot of publishing is because we very seldom get to do upper level kinds of courses. I just got letters from two groups that I would have loved to have responded to because I think it would be not easy, but a very profitable way for me to do some scholarship. But I am just too involved with other things. Number one was from a group, the PMLA, which is the most prestigious group in literary studies, doing a book on methods of teaching James Joyce's Ulysses. That is not an easy work to teach, and I have taught it. I have done seminar courses on Joyce here and had just wonderful results. But maybe I'll get to teach one of those courses in another five years, I don't know. In the meantime, seven, ten years go by. I don't have time to keep up with the research for that, and so you just think--well, should I even bother to do it? I think I have some good techniques for teaching that work, some things that might be helpful to other people, but I don't do it very frequently. How do I go back and redo those things because of choices I have made for the summer and all of that. Another was they were publishing just master plots or critical summaries of 20th century novels. And I teach a lot of these things and some of them...I looked through the list and I thought, "Boy, there are a lot of these that I bet other people don't even teach at all, and I have a pretty good handle on some of these." But finding the time to do that can be a problem. A lot of that is because you do a lot of service level courses which I enjoy. I enjoy teaching freshman English,
and I enjoy World Lit. In fact I find them to be far more stimulating oftentimes than teaching all English majors because you get people from a variety of fields who aren't just there to take notes to go out and teach in high school. Which happens. I have noticed that all along. So I enjoy the service courses. You do make some compromises just because of the kind of material you're teaching. A lot of this is in areas that you weren't particularly trained in because you're teaching World Literature. I'm not a Spanish scholar but I teach some Cervantes. But I know I do a weaker job with that as opposed to something else. I think, too, about trying to make the courses appealing to people so that they are not threatened by the courses. For a lot of people, to take a literature course is as threatening as it would be for me to go sit in on an advanced physics course these days, even though I did well in physics in high school. And so you do things that are compromises, so that people will get something out of the course other than fear and anxiety. You try to create paper topics and tests that allow people to express feelings and attitudes towards things rather than just sending everyone to the library to do it. A scholarly report on the Iliad is going to be boring if they are writing a three-page paper.

CM: What about the education that the English major gets? Or if we are talking about English majors who are geared towards teaching high school, or English majors who are geared possibly to a career in scholarship or college teaching. Do they get the best of the department when it is divided between the two groups, and we'll classify these students as those who are going to go on and those who are not?

SH: It's hard to tell; you probably have to check with graduates on something like that. In
addition to the problem of teaching a lot of service courses, we are trying to do a lot of different things for a variety of people at other levels. We have English majors who want to go get Ph.Ds; we have English majors who want to teach at high school and English majors who want to teach in elementary school. All sorts of people doing composites in communication and English. A lot of English majors are preparing for law school. Many people are doing double majors in business or computers with English. They are doing the bare minimum, and therefore a lot of them are counting hours rather than thinking of more scholarly or academic reasons for doing things. They try to fit schedules; they try to take what they perceive as interesting teachers, people they know. Because we are trying to satisfy a lot of demands and needs out there, we end up not doing the perfect job for any one of those groups. I am not sure if there is any way you can. You have to try to accommodate a lot. I just had somebody come by this morning who is at East Lansing now in business and has done Japanese studies with an English major. He says, "Oh, you're still teaching the Brit Lit Survey course. I remember that so well." And I thought, "Ahhh." There is a frustration I feel as a teacher when I'm having predominantly seniors in a class, yet they don't have any background in English literature. Maybe they are simultaneously taking another course, but when I asked in Modern Drama last year about the play, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, who is Virginia Woolf, nobody knew. A major 20th century writer. Maybe as a junior, if you would have taken the survey course, you would have at least been exposed to the name if you hadn't read something by her. I might talk to you about the 17th century poets such as Marvell, and how you
read something like The Waste Land or "Prufrock" and understand it when Marvell is just a footnote. But if you've done "To His Coy Mistress" in the survey course, you know where he is coming from and what his most famous quality is. I think the aim of our new curriculum when we adopted it, which I voted against, was depth so that we would begin to look at a lot of poems by Tennyson and the Victorian poets. And that is great. I think it has probably done some very important things for some people, but we have also lost a lot of breadth in that there are whole centuries that you know almost nothing about because you just have to take two or three period courses in British Literature. Boy, you are ill prepared for exams. Those exams don't expect that you have read 50 poems by Tennyson, but they do expect that you know a little bit about In Memoriam. That you have read "Ulysses" or that you have sampled a couple of his lyrics. That you know what time period he is in, and that he followed the Romantics and that he was influenced by them. But if you've just studied the Victorians and didn't study the Romantics, then you don't really know where he is coming from. In Survey you would have at least had that, and that's good for people teaching high school and elementary school. A lot of them don't need very specific courses. I think for those people Survey is particularly valuable. I'd almost forgotten about this until recently because I once defended the fact that Survey is being dropped.

CM: How long ago was that?

SH: Early '80s, since '83.

CM: Let's talk a little bit about Vienna Summer School. I am sure that's on your mind right now. Weighing heavily.
SH: Weighing very heavily right now since we just lost a teacher who has taught for us for 25 years. What do you need to know about it?

CM: Just start. When did you get involved?

[side A ends]

[side B begins]

SH: In 1974, I spent a summer in Poland. When I finished up I flew to Vienna because I knew a bunch of students there. I had written them letters of recommendation for Vienna Summer School, and I knew Dr. Fried a little bit. I was going to do some traveling in Europe and that seemed like a logical place to start. It is a very far eastern capital of Europe. I arrived, and they had two days to go, but I joined them for their last parties and spent a couple of days in Vienna. I think that was probably very interesting for Dr. Fried more than for me because I think he was beginning to feel as if it might be time to turn the program over to someone else but hadn't really found anybody. I just enjoyed myself. Then the following year, there was going to be a big 20th anniversary year of Hope and Vienna in 1975. As of February or March of that year, only four people had signed up. A lot of it I think had to do with the fact that May terms had just been initiated at Hope College. All of a sudden a lot of them were abroad, and up to that time the Vienna program was one of the few opportunities to go overseas. So there was a lot of competition. Prices were very rough that year; it was very bad economically, particularly with gas. So I think that effected everybody. And thirdly, Dr. Fried felt because he was in the classroom less and doing more international education kinds of things, he didn't have the contact with
the students who might--because they liked him as a teacher or something--say, "Wow, I want to see something about his summer program." The combination of factors, and nobody signed up. With four people, they couldn't run the program. I know he was very disappointed. The following year around Thanksgiving, they had about five or six inquiries. They were all brothers or sisters of people who had gone before. He asked me at a Thanksgiving evening supper where I happened to meet him, would I be interested in taking these half dozen students to Vienna? I said, "No way. I don't know German." Just the thought of bringing students to Europe; my God, they would get into so much trouble with alcohol and drugs, and I just couldn't deal with it. I enjoyed traveling, but I had always traveled pretty much alone. And was very comfortable doing that. I was not interested at all. He asked me again before Christmas, and I just said "No; I just don't have this interest." In late January I think it was--I don't know the time scheme--he said, "I really wish you'd just do this for one year. I have these half dozen kids." I knew a couple of the kids, so I thought well, gee, I guess if somebody else was going to do the teaching and Dr. Fried was very willing to help with the organizing and settling of things, it might be interesting with a small group. And then the next thing I know there was an announcement that went out and then all of sudden six people, then 21 people, and I am not sure what's going on. But Dr. Fried was just so helpful. But he wasn't coming over or anything, and I just got plopped into this thing, and it was a great year. I couldn't have asked for better students. There were 18 women and three men. I am sure I made four million mistakes; now I usually only make two million, so I have improved. There
were times I just thought, "Oh, my God, I am ruining this whole program for Hope College, but they wanted to go 20 years; we were over here, it's going 20 years, it's over." I was having a really good time despite the frustrations. Then I started getting all these letters from Dr. Fried and his secretary, Mrs. Scarlett. They were evidently pleased with things, and he was talking about the 21st year; I thought that's great; he's going to come back and do that now that I have pumped some life into it, and I felt good. Then I realized by the last couple of letters that he had no intention of coming back at all and that he was indeed in favor of a 21st year, but of course, I would be doing it. I thought no way. I'll be thankful if I get out of here alive. Well, I did get out of there alive, and I pondered it in August, and we had to decide in September because you have to get brochures ready and all of that. I thought that it is sort of like teaching a course the first time, and you're enthused about it; there is something very novel, but you make a lot of mistakes with it. You say, I could do this differently; what if I did this or what if I did that? I thought the same thing with Vienna, so I said, okay, I'll do it another year. Well then they were starting talk about the 25th anniversary. I thought this was really premature, but I kept doing it. I will do it until 1981--that will be 6 years involvement; I mean what more can the school ask for? It does take up an awful lot of time. We went through some bad economic years and all that, but we still had a number of students. Then the 25th anniversary came; it's this huge celebration over there. All these people give all this money for scholarships to continue the program. I thought I guess I can continue to do it for a couple more years. Anyway, this is number 14 that I will be doing this
summer, and we have had as many as 60 students in '87, 67 in '88; we have a smaller number this year, which is I think good for the program not to be quite so large, 51. And it continues to grow because of international reputation; we do have students from other schools. Places all over Europe know about Hope College, because of the Vienna Summer School, and that is largely because of all the stuff Paul Fried did over the years. I guess I don't tend to identify. When I think of the program, I think of it as Dr. Fried's program, but he is constantly telling me that it is not, and I guess I've taken, I don't know, over 500 people to Europe. For a lot of people it's mine, or something like that; it is the school's really. You know if something happened to me they would get somebody else to do it. But I have gotten a lot from it. It is very time-consuming. No one realizes until you go there how it is a 25-hour a day job. Never mind the constant hours during the semester particularly the second semester. But, you manage. There are a lot of things right now I'm thinking, oh boy, if I didn't have so much else to do during the school year then I could have solved this problem, or I would have this reserved. I don't know; I still--this gets back to my earlier statement--plan every day ahead of time. I keep saying I should do this differently, or I should have done that. Things somehow work out, and you get things done. I realize 100 ways everything in Vienna could be done better, but you don't have your whole life time to plan doing things better, so you do them. I could speak German a lot better, but what do I do? Do I take a year off from school to study German? I muddle through. How I handle myself in hospitals with people. Close disasters and all of that. There are at least three times every day in Vienna that you just think,
"Never again." But there are at least 10 times everyday that you think, "Oh, this is great; this is perfect; and they responded just the way I wanted them to do. This is something new that just happened. I have got to do this again next year." Or some student will say something, and I'll come back next year. So it is mostly very positive stuff, but I am somebody who is usually in a very even keel, but you can get things in Vienna that just absolutely make you ecstatic. And other things because they are other people's problems usually when you are trying to deal with a very tense situation.

You know it is just very difficult. We had a weekend in Czechoslovakia last year with the dean visiting and all of that, and a student who didn't show up, who had paid; we knew she was in a bar the night before with someone, and she never came home and all of that. I was very worried about her, yet there is a lot of experience that goes into making decisions. You try to reach the person, but she obviously wasn't home, had not gotten home. Do you leave everybody in the lurch? How guilty do you make this person feel once certain things happen? You can't let everybody on the bus know these things; it's none of their business, but you're very worried. What if the young woman has been raped by somebody? You have to judge people's past, and what has gone on and all this stuff...but those are little things.

Meanwhile we arrive at a restaurant four hours later in this little town in Czechoslovakia, that has me out in the kitchen ordering stuff, and trying to exchange money on the black market, and you've got all that stuff to worry about. You know another student group making too much noise in the hotel, and I start yelling at their director in German, and make official complaints to the hotels in communist countries,
and all of these things. Placating tour guides and showing everybody where to buy the best crystal and making phone calls to Vienna to check that yes we did finally locate her and all this sort of thing. But I still do it. You get more than you bargain for.

CM: A good story. What do you think is the best thing about Hope's English department?

SH: I would say this very quickly--the teachers. There is a lot of variety in the teachers, but I think a lot of people are very interested in the teaching process and what goes on in the classroom. I think that only can be of help to the students.

CM: What if anything would you stress improvement in?

SH: Again, a very quick answer would be: it would be nice if people had more opportunities to do the "scholarship" parts of their jobs. The people who tend to have produced are people who have released time, as John Cox has. Peter Schakel, in particular, and Kathleen Verduin have done quite a bit of publishing. Anything along these lines demands a sacrifice somewhere else. You have to recognize that everyone has different talents, and you've got to support people. Not everyone is going to, or needs to have so many scholarly articles published every year. I think those people need to be supported for the other things which they do. Some people are great counselors and spend a lot of individual one-on-one time with people. Some people are much more active in the creative writing area than in the scholarly. That is encouraged, and that is recognized. Other people are extremely good on committee work doing little details, whether it's departmental committees or school-wide committees. Obviously that satisfies some needs they have, but a lot of times that
doesn't get recognized by other people. People in our department are very supportive of each other with regard to these things. School-wide, I think that there is a perception that you count when you get a grant or you publish. If you are a good teacher, oh well, so what. I think that is probably not as true here as a lot of other places. I had a couple of books published, and I could have continued doing research on Indian novels and things like that that probably very few other people care about. But that's most peoples' research as far as I can see anyway. Obviously, I have had other interests, made other decisions. I chose to do the things I did. I can say tomorrow, I am sorry; this is 14 years in a row with Vienna; somebody else has got to do it. You make your own choices, and therefore face the facts that you don't make the publishing list every year. But, I think that maybe we all need to get more confidence in other areas. I have seen a couple of people in the department, and I won't name them, but both of whom have improved immensely as classroom teachers in the last few years for some very good and definitive reasons, which I could give you but won't because that would reveal who the people are. But I think it has also helped other kinds of work which these people do very well. I think they have done a lot of growing partly because they have learned from others. I think some of the rest of us, who maybe thrive a little more on the teaching, need to be encouraged more to do some of the other things. The mechanisms are there for that, and a lot of times you've got to push yourself like what I have done myself with the word processor. I sat there and looked at it for three weeks. I finally said this is stupid, it is taking up half of my office; I've got to do something with it. I have so much to learn right
now; it is just a glorified typewriter. But when I consider where I was with this in September, and somebody who is as busy as I am, I have utilized it a lot, and it has been very useful to me. It's taught me, even at this age, I can learn something and do some things better than I ever would have thought I would. We all need to push each other in different directions.

CM: Well, there is quite a difference among the English teachers. What do you think the perception of the English department is by the rest of the college?

SH: I do think that we are very highly regarded for the teacher quality, even though that may sound contradictory to what I just said. I do think that a lot of people here know that there are a lot of good teachers here, and we do get on these committees for teacher stuff and all of that. I'd say there is a lot of positive feeling there. I think we have a very good reputation as advisors and counselors, for the most part, throughout the school. I think certain members of the department are very highly regarded for their scholarship, and other people just don't know or feel that these people have made choices to do other kinds of things. But generally, I think there is a fairly positive attitude towards us.

CM: What about yourself on campus? What do you see as a teacher and a scholar as your role as a part of the campus community?

SH: I guess I see it as more as a teacher than a scholar. The scholar part of it--there a lot of ways that can be fulfilled. I think trying new courses, trying new material, trying to incorporate the latest developments. Not with every work, every semester, in every World Lit class. But kind of picking a few things, saying I'm going to do some more
work on this. I think I could make what I have to tell them more interesting about Hamlet or about something else. I think there are a lot of ways in which you have to keep up with that, but you can't because we teach so many different things here. The important thing is not to get into a rut, which is doing the same things over and over again. Some courses because they stress the classics demand some of the same things over and over again. But they are trying new approaches to it, which I guess leads into the teaching thing, which I see as something that is a very prime part of who I am. So I try to make classes as exciting and interesting as possible. Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. But you keep trying. I also see a lot of the role here as a counselor and advisor, maybe because I do a lot of it. I don't know that I do more or less than other people, but I do talk with a lot of students on a variety of levels—personal, social problems. I have been very involved over the years with groups such as Mortar Board, Cosmopolitan fraternity, and the Delta Phi sorority, and other groups as well. And because you get to know people in other situations, never mind all the very different types of relationships that develop in Vienna; many of those students I never had in any classes at all, yet there is a special kind of rapport, an understanding. Not with everyone, but it develops where these people might seek me out before other people because I would be a little less non-threatening, and I am not going to grade them on something. Somebody who you know had a great time in the summer. You know more about who they are from another perspective,

CM: How do you feel that you have contributed to the academic or cultural life on campus?
I was involved with some interesting things connected with those writings years ago. I guess a lot depends on how you define culture. I think I have thought through it with a lot of help from a lot of other people. Certainly an awareness of Austrian culture to this campus. Whether it be in regard to art shows, or just all the returning students, etc. That has been probably the most important contribution, and just the fact of exposing people who might not ever leave western Michigan, who didn't have a Vienna Summer School, and that sort of thing. I am somebody who can count on one hand the number of Hope theater productions I've missed in 17 years. In fact, I think I have probably only missed one except for my sabbatical time. I missed a couple from the summer theater once, but I have seen almost all of those as well. I am somebody who is always encouraging students to go out to see those kinds of things. I wasn't as active this year with poetry readings, but I have always been a great attender of those, and I encourage people to go. I have participated far more in a lot of the cultural things, the Great Performance Series and all of that stuff. I am not somebody who has participated at all in the athletic life of the college. And part of that was that I find it very time consuming to go to basketball games and things like that. And I know a lot of professors do; they really love that and a lot of students get pats on the back because they have scored the winning basket or field hockey goal. But I don't think that is very important. I find that about 90% of Hope students define themselves in terms of their athletic activity which is frightening, but that is a whole other issue. I think there are enough teachers out there doing that. They are very supportive of those students, and I think that is great. I follow sports, but I don't
ever watch them on TV. So I know what the Hope teams are doing, but I don't go to the games. Some students think that is awful that I don't say "...scored the winning point." But I think there are probably very few teachers who know the kids who are on stage in the theater productions, who hear the kids read their poetry in Opus, outside of the people in those departments, who go to the music concerts and send a note to a student who performed or whatever. I try to do that. Part of it is my own interests lie there. But there is just so much you can do. I think I have been to half a dozen homecoming games. I never watch the games; I just go to meet all the alumni. I have been to three basketball games in seventeen years.

CM: Well you're three up on me. (laughs)

SH: You're a good person to tell that to.

CM: No judgment from me. I think that is very gratifying for the students to get the sense that their professors are part of this community that they themselves feel very wrapped up in. At least I do, to see professors at the same thing that I am going to is sort of, "Oh good, we're all in this together," kind of idea.

SH: Even socially, and up until recently, just going to Delphi and Cosmo formals, which is great fun, and I always enjoyed those immensely. Nobody thought of you as "the chaperon," and I can't do this and I can't do that. I remember going two years ago to the Winter Fantasia when they invited faculty. And SAC--they used to do it when I was on SAC years ago, and I served on that for four years, and then nobody went for years, and then I think it was '88 Winter Fantasia; they invited faculty members. There were about 12-18 faculty who went. And not only did all of us have a great
time, but I think a lot of students were really happy to see faculty there. The faculty
got a room upstairs, too, where they retreated to do other things as well. It was just
neat to see that kind of thing, and I thought, "I wish more faculty were here." I think
they really...even if it was just mingling. You didn't have to be on the dance floor,
but just a physical presence there. It is nice to see everybody dressed up. This sort
of thing. I just found that a lot of fun to do that stuff.

CM: Not only as a social community, but also as an academic sort of community, do you
see or would you like to see professors and students with more academic interaction?
The idea of mutual scholarship?

SH: I think we are trying to go in that direction. I think we have realized that we don't
have that. I like the summer programs this year involving teacher/student research. I
would have done that immediately had I not been going to Vienna. In fact I thought
of doing it in terms of involving one of the students in Vienna because I am setting up
a senior seminar this summer for the first time, and why not involve a student who
could get some extra money which might help pay costs there in terms of evaluating
the whole process of what I am doing and coming up with suggestions. Part of that
was a matter of time to get the grant proposal in to do that when I am trying to get 50
people on flights which is the time that that came. It is hard to do, but I think that's
really important, and I'm very eager to hear what people have done. I know that
already at the faculty conference in the fall, the faculty moderator was talking to Dean
Bruins, who is the provost, the other day that we are going to have people report back
and that sort of thing. I think we should try to encourage more of this stuff,
particularly the academic. I think we need to do more of the social stuff that we do with people in the English department. We need to do more of that stuff so that what we do in the classroom isn't just isolated. And since we have so few seminars, even when we do offer particular high level courses, four or five people take them because everyone has so many things they have to do anyway to get their triple major. Bypass surgery or something. And you don't get to have that kind of closer contact with the students on an intellectual level. I always found that when I gave my seminars we always met outside of class a couple of times. Joyce seminar, George Bernard Shaw seminar. Joyce always had good numbers; the Shaw one I was stunned because there was such a low enrollment. The next year I would have had a lot more people; it was one of those things. I tried to have people to my house, Irish dinners for the Joyce thing, but even there the nights were not just social; they were talking about things when people did present their papers, and offered critiques and all of that. It was just an exciting kind of atmosphere. I find I got a little of that in my satire class because we just had so much fun. We would meet at my house, and we would do bizarre things on campus. I was writing satire as well, so I was doing these assignments along with the students. It was a learning process, and they could say, "Boy that was boring," about my political satire. I learned a lot about my writing just by the process that I went through, kicking myself the night before the class because I had said I would do all the assignments, and here I hadn't even started it yet. It was because of that; it's more at a very superficial level when you talk about academics, but I think all of us learned more about the writing because I was participating as well.
CM: I didn't begin to cover everything that I thought that I would get done, but I know that you want to get to that recital and it is 1:30, almost.

[end of interview]