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Barbara Carson
Rollins College

Wenxian Zhang
Rollins College, wzhang@rollins.edu

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Oral History Interview - Barbara Carson

Zhang: Good morning.

Carson: Good morning.

Zhang: My name is Wenxian Zhang, Head of Archives and Special Collections; today is Wednesday, March 7, 2007. I'm going to interview Dr. Barbara Carson, Ted and Barbara Alfond Professor of English. So, Barbara: of all the people I've interviewed - a dozen people - none of them are native Floridians--

Carson: Oh yeah?

Zhang: You are the first one.

Carson: I am? I am indeed, yeah.

Zhang: Tell me about your--

Carson: Background?

Zhang: Yeah.

Carson: I was born in Cocoa, Florida, over on the east coast about fifty miles from Orlando, and it's not Cocoa Beach, because this is the mainland. Uh, so my father was working at the Air Force Naval Air Station -- Air Force base, Naval Air Station -- so I was born there, and we moved away for about eighteen months after the war, and then moved back and I grew up there and graduated from high school there, so I went to elementary school through high school in Cocoa. At the time when I was born, it was kind of a sleepy fishing village -- uh, orange growing. And then in the fifties, the missile base came there, and so I remember growing up and hearing the neighbors yell, "Missile!" and everybody would run outside; that was in pre-air-conditioning days, so people would run outside and usually watch a Vanguard missile blow up, because there were a lot of accidents back then, and then of course Cape Canaveral developed with the manned space program, and so forth, so it was an exciting place to grow up in, it meant that, in addition to being a place where the population was largely -- unlike many places in Florida, the population was largely Southern, there were a lot of people coming through even in those early days from other parts of the country, so it had a-- It wasn't as limited, I think, as far as experience, as some of the other towns in the state. But it was a good place to grow up, a little town.

Zhang: So both your elementary and high schools are here, in Florida.

Carson: Absolutely, right, yep. Had my first job at the Cocoa Public Library when I was in the seventh grade, I think, and I became a page in the library -- which I think is just the best title in the world, a page in the library -- so I would walk downtown after classes in the seventh grade, and I made thirty-five cents an hour. Even now when I get my Social Security

statements back, I look back and there's like a year where the reported income is something like, I don't know, thirty dollars, or-- (laughs). Right, it was. Very strange.

Zhang: I understand also you're a Seminole.

Carson: I went to Tallahassee. Actually, I had my first year of college at Brevard Junior College, it was called then. And then the second year I went to Florida State and got my bachelor's degree from Florida State in 1964.

Zhang: So what made you decide to major in English?

Carson: I always loved literature in high school, it was one of my favorite classes, but I started out, actually, as a history major. 'Cause I thought I wanted-- I also really liked my history teachers, and I liked history. And I thought I wasn't good enough to be an English major, I thought it was something sort of to aspire to. And so, an early professor at Florida State, a professor of English, said after reading a paper of mine, "Why don't you become an English major?" "Oh, do you think I can?" And that became one of those things that I later worked into an article of mine, that idea of a professor tapping a student. Sometimes all I think that's needed is for someone to say, "You know, I think you could do that," and it just opened up the whole world to me, so I stopped being a history major and became an English major. And a few other things played in there, too, I also-- At that time I thought I was going to teach high school, and I found out that you couldn't just teach American history, which is what I wanted to teach; you had to teach, you know, geography and all sorts of other things if you were-- So you had to major in social science. And then I found out that to teach in high school, you had to take education courses, and I had heard that they were pretty fluffy and not very challenging, so I didn't want to do that, so by that time I was thinking that I wanted to teach in college. So, that's how I got to English.

Zhang: Okay, tell me about your graduate study at John Hopkins.

Carson: Uh huh. I went to Johns Hopkins; I was there from 1964 to 1968, got my PhD in 1968. It was one of those silly and strange choices; my husband at the time was also choosing a graduate school, and he was in physics, and so we were trying to choose a school that was good in both. But actually, I was so naïve about choosing graduate schools. I was going through college catalogues and I really liked the architecture of Johns Hopkins, and of course I'd heard the name. (sighs) So naïve. And so I thought, well, this will be a nice place to go, and I really didn't know a whole lot about the school, except that it had a good reputation. And so when I got there, I was really surprised by the high professionalism; I didn't know that it was based on sort of the German university system, and the idea is that-- Well, we at Hopkins in the graduate program took two years of courses, and then you had a year which you spent working independently to prepare for your comprehensive exam, and then a year to do your dissertation, and of course you know, some people took longer. So it was very independent work, and I was just, my breath was taken away by how challenging it was, and just a whole other level of performance, but-- And so a lot of time I spent feeling very intimidated and thinking I was out of my territory.

It's also strange because the year I went, there were only nineteen new graduate students accepted in English, and of those, only three of us were women, and we were the first women in -- I guess four years, because there were no women in the classes ahead of us. And the undergraduate program was entirely male. Now, though, back when I realize how sexist it was; even as we were coming in the orientation meeting, we were told that the women had to have a much stronger record than the men to be accepted, and one of the stories I tell my students was, there was something called a Tutor and Student Club, it was an endowed room and organization for the English department at Hopkins, and every month they would have what they called a smoker at the time, where the men got together over cigars and wine and hors d'oeuvres and someone gave a paper, a talk, and when the invitations to this came out each month -- engraved invitations -- one was posted on the bulletin board in the English office, and it said, "by the terms of the endowment, women are not admitted." And at the time, I was a little, you know, peeved by it, but I thought, well you know, that's the way it is, and I can't believe that I didn't protest or something. But, so, and I think in some ways that was how the men learned to talk to the other men -- professors -- as colleagues, and so the women had to deal with that too. But it was, I guess, good training in just working independently, and I had a professor who was very supportive, Charles Anderson, and so I'm glad I went there -- I wish, in some ways, I had been able to use the experience in different ways: I was very quiet, tried to sort of disappear around the seminar table, and didn't say much. But it was a good challenge.

Zhang: Yeah, I'm surprised to hear about the gender barriers--

Carson (speaking simultaneously): Oh, geez!

Zhang: --It's hard to believe, in the sixties, in the middle of the civil rights movement--

Carson: Yeah, exactly! And just oblivious, I was so oblivious to it, and there were other things; I had a really strong undergraduate record -- at the time I had the highest GPA at Florida State that I guess had ever been achieved -- and really good recommendations from my professors, and initially, I wasn't accepted at Hopkins. And my husband then, he was in another department, but of course his record wasn't as strong, and he was, and so I just, you know, wrote to them and said, well, this is our first choice, is it possible to-- I was accepted, but I wasn't given any scholarship, or fellowship. And so I write saying that, is it possible that second semester, a scholarship might become-- fellowship might become available. And they wrote back, "Well, it's not likely, but what we'll do is we'll waive your tuition." So I said well, you know, okay, we'll try to figure out a way to make it, and so I went there, and by the time I got there, they needed someone to teach a freshman class, and so I got a teaching fellowship, and that turned out to be wonderful, because I was then confirmed in how much I loved teaching, and actually, I think the first semes[ter]-- maybe the second semester I was teaching two sections, so it worked out, but in another case of the gender -- It *may* be a gender thing, I was the only married woman to be accepted, and I got the feeling that in their mind they were saying, oh, you know married women, they'll get pregnant and not finish. (laughs) I don't know what was going on.

Zhang: That time frame is also the era of the Vietnam War, so what are some events you remember?

Carson: Well, I remember marching downtown Baltimore against the war, and as we went under an underpass, seeing the people taking pictures, we were pretty sure they were CIA or Secret Service or something, I don't know what they would have done with it. I remember having teach-ins, so periodically the classes would be dismissed and we would go out on the campus -- candlelight vigils protesting the war. Interestingly enough, when I first arrived in '64, that was -- I guess it was '64 -- Lyndon Johnson's first campaign, and he came to Hopkins, and made a really big campaign speech sort of implying, or stating maybe, that he wasn't going to raise the number of troops in Vietnam -- ha. And so, I also during that period, too, I worked on the campaign for Eugene McCarthy, and so that was the first political volunteering I had done. He was the anti-war candidate at the time. I remember going over to Washington, D.C, there was a busload of us went over, a carload maybe, I can't remember, and we went around to the projects taking petitions -- actually, at the time, to put Robert Kennedy's name on a ballot, and the idea was that he would be sort of a placeholder for Eugene McCarthy, and I can at least sort of recall [can't make out] going to somebody's town house and sitting on the floor and eating fried chicken, you know, take-out fried chicken, and it was a wonderful sense of camaraderie, working together and going to a campaign appearance of Eugene McCarthy. So then in '68, after I got my degree, I started teaching at _____ State, and there were times then when we had what were called class moratoria, and again, without announcement sometimes, the classes would sort of break up and go outside and sit down and talk about the war, so it was an exciting period, because I think we really had the sense that we could make a difference, and so there wasn't that sense of, "Well, it's going to happen anyway." And it was a sad time too, of course, watching-- While at graduate school, I had my first television since my marriage, and so you'd sit eating dinner watching Walter Cronkite -- from Vietnam, you know -- and there was that disjunction between, you know, we're watching people in real time being killed and/or the shortly aftermath of battles, and the whole chaos of the Ohio State killing, and over and over again, it seemed like all the time there was some sort of moral challenge that we were facing and then having to somehow decide how we were going to treat it in class, and how we were going to help our students through it. So, yeah, it was a strange time, and I try not to romanticize it now, but I think it was an optimistic time, in spite of all the tragedies, because we thought we could do something about it.

Zhang: Right, uh, now let's talk about your teaching experience. You mentioned that you started teaching as a graduate student at John Hopkins, then you-- _____ State, and then UMass?

Carson: Yup, yup, yup. I taught for two years at _____ State, and then I got a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, so by that time, that third year, my husband then had accepted a position at UMass and Amherst. And so I used the fellowship from the National Endowment to have a year's leave from _____ State, and then the fourth year after I graduated, I was assistant professor at UMass and Amherst for a year before we moved down here, and uh, yeah, being a teaching assistant at Johns Hopkins was really confirming, because I think that just sort of kept my sanity, sort of kept me grounded, and reminded me during -- it was a really tough time in graduate school -- what I was doing it for, because I just love the classroom, and I felt like I-- You know, when it was quiet in someone else's class, when I was, it was my class, I felt as if I sort of came alive, and I loved that

exchange of ideas, and the challenge, and the growth, and just what it felt like when students had those “Aha” moments in class. And the other thing that was really wonderful about teaching at Hopkins was that we didn’t teach merely the freshman rhetoric classes, that by the third and fourth year, we were assigned classes in survey of British lit, or survey of American lit, and I did both of those. And, we had, really, control of our classes, to a large extent -- the big-name professors gave a lecture once a week, but we had, our sections met independently of that, and there was a real sense of independence. Those section meetings were really the class, and the other was sort of icing.

And so I knew I loved teaching; by that time I had decided that I wanted to teach at a small college, rather than at a large university. _____ State was a college then, University of Massachusetts obviously was big, but I knew even at the University of Massachusetts, if I had my wish I’d be at a small college. But Massachusetts was wonderful because it’s terrific to be in the same town where Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost walked around, and it’s a beautiful place, too. But after-- So in 1972, my husband was appointed to assistant professor at Rollins in the physics department, and so it was sort of his turn to get the job, because I’d always had the jobs before, and so we came here -- he came here. And I thought, I’ve never had any trouble getting a job before, and so surely something will come up either at Rollins or at University of Central Florida, which was then, uh--

Zhang: FTU.

Carson: FTU, Florida Technological University, right, and then it was seven years before a full-time position developed at Rollins, so during those seven years, my daughters were born, and I taught part-time as an adjunct at Rollins, at Valencia; one semester I took over for someone at UCF who was on sabbatical. And so I kept my hand in, and I kept writing during that period, and so that was useful, but there are times when I like to joke that I felt sort of vulturish, sort of waiting for somebody to retire in the English department, and it was an awkward time too, because I felt that I wanted whenever a position became available to come in under my own speed, and not just because I was Bob Carson’s wife; and so I tried not to become really close to any member of the English department, and so I was having to do this balancing act of being a part of the community but sort of keeping hands off so that there wouldn’t be a sense that I was, you know, angling for a position. So I felt really good when the position in American lit did become available. There was a national competition, a national search, and so that was good. It was a scary period, because I remember thinking, oh my gosh, what if I never get back in the classroom full-time? On the other side, of course, it looked like it was wonderful because I had that time to be at home with my children when they were very young, but you don’t know that when you’re inside that hiatus.

Zhang: So, you came here in 1972, 73. So what’s your first impression of Rollins?

Carson: Well, you know, I had heard of it vaguely when I was living in Cocoa, but it was always something very vague, it was an expensive college, and you know, I didn’t know much about it. Of course, when we came, I thought it was just beautiful; I love the idea of a close campus and the small student body. What I remember mostly from that first trip was going to the chapel and just sort of meditating there -- I’m not a religious person, but it’s such a

gorgeous place, and sort of sending out wishes to the universe that we got to end up here. So I really liked the spirit of Rollins, and I remember during those years how amazed I was that we were very quickly accepted into the college community. I mean, we were invited to the president's house -- or the provost house, I guess the provost house, uh, the time -- for dinner, and it wasn't like everybody was invited, there were maybe five couples, and we were part of that, and we were just an assistant professor. And we had the provost to our house, and I was just amazed at that feeling of being a part of the Rollins family. So, that was my main first impression.

Zhang: What about the student body? Do you feel that they are different from today's?

Carson: So you-- Once I began to teach here, right? Because I started teaching full-time in [19]79. Uh, yeah, I think in some ways they were different. Well, it's very hard for me to decide what is the basis of comparison, because when I first came, a third of the Rollins student body was majoring in business. And Thad Seymour, who came to Rollins the year before I started teaching full-time, was the one who ended the business major at Rollins, and I think that made a huge difference in the student body, insofar as there was a change in the early days in a focus on getting a job in business to emphasis on the liberal arts. And so, those early days after Thad came, there was a really heady excitement, among students and among faculty, I think, about the commitment to the liberal arts. So, the comparison is a little blurred there. But if I start thinking about students, say, after the business major went away, and we had more students who were purely majoring in English, in, say, the middle and late '80s, to the students now, I think, honestly, I do see some differences. As I recall, those students came in with more reading behind them; they seemed to know, to be able to allude to works of literature more freely (??) than students do now. And if you asked them their favorite works or what they liked to read, they might be more likely to at least mention some of the classics, rather than popular works -- that could have just been their ability to say what you wanted them to say. But I think there's that difference. Other than that, young people are exciting whatever experience they bring; they want to learn, they want to do well. And probably, there has been an improvement in-- I know, statistically, there's an improvement in the SATs over the years, and so forth. So, I don't in any ways want to say, "Well, back in the old days they were better," 'cause I think it's just different, they're different rather than one better than the other. But I do think they read less now.

Zhang: So, what courses have you taught at Rollins?

Carson: Although I have taught freshman writing and sometimes British lit, my major responsibility has been in American literature. So I regularly, every year, teach the junior level survey of American lit[erature], both sections; in addition to that, I have developed courses in special areas in American lit: Eudora Welty one time, I've taught a Henry James course one time or two, and Hawthorne, you know, Faulkner, I taught the 1920s. I've also-- Welty-Tyler-Morrison is another favorite course where I put works by Eudora Welty, Anne Tyler and Toni Morrison together and read those. I've also developed an interest in the last decade in the classics of children's literature, and I've been enjoying teaching that -- it's particularly good, I think, for the freshmen and sophomores, they're making that transition into college, leaving the childhood behind in a kind of dramatic way. They enjoy looking back on those books of

childhood and reading them from an adult perspective, and it's an easy way, a kind of tricky way to introduce-- or hone their skills in analyzing literature, with texts that aren't intimidating. And it's just fun to watch all of us respond to those: you know, *Peter Pan*, *Tom Sawyer* and *Alice in Wonderland* and so forth. So, that's the area, and of course, back when we had winter term, every winter term we would all develop a new course, or very often we'd develop new courses, and that was fun to play around with. That's often where we'd try out a course and then [it'd] find its way into the regular curriculum after that. I've also taught for the honors program, the humanities section; I've taught in the Holt school, the honors course there; done a lot of teen teaching. Gary Williams and I, over the years, have taught southern literature from a history and literature perspective. I've taught in the Community of Learners; I was the first master learner in that program. So that was, that's part of my background too.

Zhang: Yeah, I look at the file you have here -- you have so many fascinating courses: _____ life in the nineteenth century--

Carson (Speaking simultaneously): Right, right.

Zhang: --death in American literature.

Carson (speaking simultaneously): Yeah, that's right.

Zhang: I wish I could take some of your courses.

Carson: I had totally forgotten about death in American literature; that was a winter term course I think, right. And that was fun, yeah. So those were good times when we could-- you know, [it was] challenging, you had to work really hard to put a course into the winter term session, but it was nice, yeah.

Zhang: So tell me, in your opinion, what course are you enjoying most, what-- some of the courses you found interesting or more challenging?

Carson: Right. Oh, it's probably a clichéd answer, you know, the favorite one I'm teaching now, because truly, I think it's the experience of being in a classroom rather than the course itself; but if I had -- Oh dear, if I had to choose, (pause) it might be, I remember one specific year -- term that I offered a Welty-Tyler-Morrison class, and it was just a-- the students just worked perfectly together. And the students and I had this wonderful relationship, it was a-- And every challenge I gave them, they just exceeded my expectations. And so, it was that wonderful excitement of exchange of ideas and knowing that they were going to do their best, and every day I could come in and expect to learn something from them. And I remember particularly, once in that class the students were asked to do a presentation, and I don't even know what the presentation -- Well, some book; that's right, they chose a book and they were giving a background lecture, or maybe just conducting a background discussion on it. And so one group was up in front of the class, giving the presentation, and I noticed that the one person who was leading it was dressed in a blue blazer, and she had a coffee cup, and I was looking at that, and all of a sudden I realized that she was doing -- and she was drawing on the board in a special way, and being sort of frenetic -- and I realized she was doing a parody of me, because

at that stage I was at my blue blazer stage, and I always came to class with a coffee cup, and I was always jumping around and writing. And so, suddenly when I realized, of course we all had a really big laugh, and I felt so good because they were relaxed enough and confident enough of our relationship that they knew they could tease me, so -- it was great.

Zhang: That might be a kind of rewarding experience--

Carson: It was good, and actually, one of the students in that class now teaches English at Winter Park High School, and she, as I understand it, tells her class about our experience, and in fact, one of my friend's daughters was in her class, and so she, you know, conveys the message that her teacher hasn't forgotten those days either, and that's very nice.

Zhang: Yeah; I look at your files, and all through the pictures, it's very apparent to me that you really care about your students, you're passionate for teaching. So let me-- Share with me some of the students that you will always remember or cherish their roles in your life.

Carson: There-- Of course there are so many but you know, that's the student I mentioned there; her name now is Kim (??) Wilkes, and she's married to our basketball coach. Another student from the very early years is Carolyn Van Bergen. And she was, you know, we just did one of those vignettes-- I guess she probably graduated in '82 or '83, but one of the vignettes that I remember of her is being in class, and Carolyn was sitting around our round table, and I was up there, and she was right over there, and I was teaching Walt Whitman. And, uh-- In teaching Song of Myself, I always try to teach the section forty-six of the poem, because I see it as a kind of expression of the teacher's ideal. It, there's a line it that says, "I will you to be a strong swimmer," and something like that, "The student who most honors me learns under me to destroy the teacher." And so I was reading that and telling them that this was my vision of the good mentor, the good teacher. And I looked over at Carolyn, and she had a tear coming down because she was so moved by that, and later on Jill Hollingsworth, who was another student in class, said, uh, I-- who tuned in, resonated with that, she gave me a little plaque that I still have near my desk that has that line from Walt Whitman on it. And both of those students went on to graduate school in English; Carolyn got her PhD.

But of course, I also remember the students I failed; I don't mean failed as a grade, but didn't help in the way that I wish I had. And so those students haunt me, too: the ones that I couldn't get into the, to hook into the interest of the class, the ones who didn't feel that I had responded to them the way they needed. And so those, those hang in. But it wasn't always the student with the best grade. There are so many students whose names I probably have forgotten, but whose faces in class I remember because they were the ones I could always count on to add something to the discussion, bring a joke to class when it was lagging. There are a lot of sort of blurred faces out there that merge into a sense of sort of just the joy of being in the classroom.

Zhang: You mentioned earlier about the teen teaching; I understand you and Gary and uh, (pause) Griffin--

Carson: (laughs) Yeah! And Steve Neilson, too. (laughs)

Zhang: Creativity, that's--

Carson: That's right, I'm amazed that you know about that. That was one of those experiences, that's very humbling. Yeah, this was with the Holt school; there were four of us teaching it, and we were going to do it, I think at least two semesters, maybe we did two years, I don't know. But we thought we really had this thing knocked. We planned and we met every weekend; we had a great time together. We learned so much, you know, here's a physicist and a historian, a theater person, an English person, and we really worked hard. And at the end, when we read the evaluations the first term, we noticed that the students weren't liking it as much as we were, so you know, I couldn't quite figure out what was going on, they would say, or didn't know what was happening in here or how the ideas connected. So we thought, "Okay. We're going to really improve it next time." And so we *really* worked the next time making, we thought, very clear the connections among the ideas, and we had films and videos, and we were, you know, giving out handouts, and we were really, we thought, clarifying things. And it really was going well until the last class meeting, where we're all meeting together in what's now the John Ross classroom, I think. And Gary Williams stood up, and unfortunately, we say, he said, "Well," to the class, "what do you think?" You know, this is the end of the semester. Bad question, because some guy pulled himself up and said, "What was this course supposed to be about?" (laughs)

And so, you know, we were so depressed, I mean really, and Bob Miller, who was then the head of the Holt school, had a plaque made that was -- I think he called it the "Grace Under Pressure" award. Because most of-- *All* of us were used to very good evaluations, and I mean, we did not get, you know, they were-- They usually said, "These are nice people, but--" You know, one of those kinds of things. I don't know where that plaque is now, but for a while we passed it around to each other, and even now whenever we get together, we laugh about that class, and I think it's a good thing, maybe, for young people to realize that, you know, you can work your butt off and think you're doing well, and then poof! You know, but don't ask, "What do you think?" (laughs) But *we* had a great time, and as far as faculty development was concerned, it was wonderful. Students didn't agree.

Zhang: Uh, also you mentioned about a master of learners in '83, so you were one of the faculty members. So what course did you enroll, and-- you were not actually living in a dorm.

Carson: No, I didn't live in the dorm, but this is as close as I could-- A little bit of background on that, if I could: when Thad Seymour came to Rollins, he helped establish a link between Rollins and the Great Lakes Colleges-- College association, consortium, whatever -- that he had-- his college, Wabash, had been a member of when he was up there. And so, from '79 on, for a good many years, Rollins faculty members would go up to Kinyon and practice teaching. And then, one of those was Jack Lane, who went up there very early on, and then Jack became interested in a teaching system out of Stony Brook in New York that was called a community of learners, and the idea was that a group of students would take all their classes together, and that one student in the class would be a professor, who would also take the classes, and write the papers and get graded, and then there would be a seminar that a faculty member would facilitate that would link all the classes together. So I guess what I'm saying is,

this was a time of really intense thinking about teaching and close-- making active learners at Rollins, which came from the Kinyon workshops as well as now from Stony Brook influence. And so, Jack, bless his heart, he was so wonderful about this, Jack Lane: whenever he wanted to do something, he'd say, "Well, just start something," and you know, so not five years of planning, just start it. And so we got together and he said, "Well, let's start this," so I went up to Stony Brook and talked to Pat Hill, is the person who was organizing it up there, and so we ____, okay, well next fall, we'll try to have one at Rollins.

And so I was a master learner, and that means I was a professor, I was released from my teaching duties, I took all these courses with the students, and I was supposed to model learning-- habits of good learning, and facilitate the seminar. And the topic was human dignity, I think, and it was race, sex and gender. So there was a philosophy class with Tom Cook, a class in race and American history with Gary Williams, and an anthropology class in gender with Carol Lauer. And I-- That was an amazing experience. I didn't live in the dorms, but it felt as if I was being with the students, you know, most of the time, and so-- I don't think I've ever worked as hard in my life; I thought that, you know, the life of a professor was difficult, uh, demanding -- I was working sixty plus hours a week to keep up with these eighteen-year-olds, and when the test was given, all that old adrenaline came back, gotta make the A, so I was over in the library, studying and practicing, and I remember once I wrote a paper for Gary Williams' class, and he handed it back, and there was no grade on it. And I was like, oh my gosh, he hated it, oh, oh, and I was so embarrassed, but there was no comment, and so I finally worked up courage after a couple of days, saying, (sheepishly) "Gary, why didn't you put a grade or a comment on my paper?" and he said, "What? I thought you knew it was excellent, I didn't think I needed to." And all of a sudden, I just realized how much, even at this stage, I was attaching to someone else's evaluation. And so, it really helped me see things from a student's perspective, to reevaluate all my easy suggestions about, "Oh, well don't pay so much attention to grades." Well, when I was a student again, I was paying attention to grades. And I also loved during that period the kind of relaxed relationship with our students: the students called me by my first name, they called Jack and Carol and Tom by their first names. And so, one really practical and obvious change that took place during that period is when I went back into the classroom to teach, I had to, I changed the configuration of the desk in my office, because before that, I had had, uh, I was here, my desk was there, and students that came in sat there, and that separation just felt terrible after that. And so I pushed the desk against the wall so that I could be closer to the students, and over the years, I've tried to encourage my students to call me Barbara rather than Dr. Carson, but you know, some do and some don't. But that was a wonderful experience, and it was a wonderful program that went on for-- You probably know how many years more than I, but it -- and it went on in publicity longer than it even existed in reality, so it was a nice thing.

Zhang: Related to this, I understand you and Jack Lane also played a leadership role in creating the ACS Teaching Walk.

Carson: Yeah, that's another example of Jack's just, "Let's get it done," sort of a Judy Garland kind of thing, you know, "Let's put on a show!" And uh, yeah, as a -- and this goes directly back to Kinyon, because we had all, you know, Jack and Gary and I had all gone to the Kinyon teaching workshop. And one of the central strategies there was microteaching, where

you give a little slice of a class -- I forget there if it was five or seven minutes, or whatever -- and it's videotaped, and then you play it back, and the other professors, who are acting -- who are being students at the time, we talk about it together. And so, we were all so enthralled by how helpful this was; we came back, we tried it out a little bit on campus with other faculty members, and then Jack said, "Well, let's do a workshop ourselves," and so he arranged to get other faculty members from the Associated Colleges of the South to come to Rollins in January or February, we had solicited names of excellent teachers, and we did the planning during that February and sent out a call for people to select two faculty members from each college, and I think we had twenty or so faculty members show up, and so Jack and Gary and I and others were the first facilitators, and then out of that group, we chose new facilitators for the next year, and so over the years has been overlapped with new (??), and it's continued even to today, I think it's been one of the premiere activities of the Associated Colleges of the South, and it's been wonderful to really bring Rollins into the consortium, and I think to make the consortium alive, because people really know each other among the colleges.

Zhang: Yeah, I can testify. I'm a graduate.

Carson: You were a graduate, that's right, you did!

Zhang: --I really feel it's a benefit--

Carson: Yeah!

Zhang: --tremendously.

Carson: It's amazing, and yeah, I remember now that, hearing that you had gone, that was, I mean knowing that you'd gone. It was great, and it's just a good-- Again, just faculty development. Nothing else happens. The exchange of ideas is wonderful.

Zhang: Now let's talk about mentoring; there's a good picture of you with Gill Jones,

Carson (speaking simultaneously): Yeah.

Zhang: You also compiled a brochure, "Advice to Professors."

Carson: Oh, right, right. Yeah, right, from graduate students in college. I had forgotten about this.

Zhang: So what advice would you give to the young faculty members?

Carson: Hmm. Wow. Don't listen to advice. (both laugh) No. Oh, I guess, you know, just love it. And, so that's one. But that sort of suggests total, total passion and almost self-sacrifice, maybe. So probably I'd say, "But also realize you're in this for the long term, and you've got to consider your needs as well as the students'." And so, I think that, if you're going to love it, you have to also realize that you have a life of your own outside of Rollins. And I've, too much I've been saddened by colleagues who have become so totally sacrificial that they've

neglected their spouses or their children, and I think there's a real need for a balancing, because it's so, it's very easy to almost have the monastic ideal, that we have to be-- 100 percent of our time has to go to the students, and I think you have to work on your own health, too. So, I think the healthy professor will bring that back into the classroom. But otherwise, I think it's all, after love your subject, love your students, try to figure out ways to convey that love to the students, and the rest is sort of nuts and bolts, learning how to do that. And so, talk about it with colleagues and find a way that works best for you. Listen; I guess that's it too.

Zhang: That's great, thank you. Now, let's talk about the researchers' scholarship. So, what made you decide to conduct a research on professors' place in students' memories?

Carson: I remember the moment, actually, that I got that idea: when Barbara Alford came to Rollins to announce that she was going to endow a chair. When she made the announcement, I had no idea that I was going to be tapped to fill the chair, but she gave a little talk in Woolson house, and what she did was so touching, because she talked about the professors that she remembered in the English department at Rollins, and how they had made a difference in her life. And I remember, I was standing, I think I was standing in the back of Woolson house, and I was thinking, my goodness, I wonder what -- personally, what my students would say about me -- but I wonder just in general what our students now would say about those of us who are here. And I just sort of tucked that away, wouldn't that be interesting, to hear that. And so then, when I found out that I was going to be named to the chair and had some research funds, I thought, you know, this is a good time to follow through on that question, to pursue it. And so, I used some of the funds to write to the students, and the result was probably the article that more people have read than any other article or essay that I've ever written, which shouldn't be surprising because it's really about what we're about, about teaching. And I think it touches people in a way that articles on Eudora Welty or Anne Tyler or Katherine Anne Porter, or whoever, in ways that they don't. And so, that's how it got started.

And able to combine with that, I think something I mentioned in the article, was one day, I was going down to a local nursery -- I had a bare spot in my yard and I thought I was going to get some sod -- and I went into the shop there and there was a woman at the desk, and she said, "You're Barbara Carson, aren't you?" and I said, "Yeah," and she said, "I'm Pat so-and-so," and she said, "I had a class with you ten years ago," and she said, "I loved that class!" And I said, "Oh, great. What class was it?" And she said, "Oh-- I don't know," and I thought she just couldn't remember the official title, so I said, was it women's lit, or was it, you know, Anne Tyler, and "No, no," and nothing, she couldn't remember anything about the class, but she remembered she loved it. And so I left, and I was really puzzled, you know, what does this mean? And so, it was sort of those two things, like, what do students remember about us? And what leads them to say that a class is good, you know, that they loved it. And then having the opportunity that Barbara Alford offered, so those were the two stimuli that led to the project. And so I wrote to the students and then sort of tried to do this very qualitative research, not quantitative, but analyze their responses, and one of the questions was, "What advice would you give to professors?" And that's where this little brochure came from, and then I extended it by asking current students and my colleagues to offer suggestions too, so those are all sort of mixed up in there.

Zhang: Later you have co-sponsored a study with Mark Freeman?

Carson: You know, Mark and I never -- We started one, and we haven't really ever gotten it off the ground, because we were thinking about doing a project in which we would look at what professors have learned from their students, you know, that way, that is, professors' memories of their students. And we held a lunch where people talked about it, Mark and I have played around with the ideas, but somehow it just didn't move forward, I think because it was busy time in both of our lives. But the other thing is that somehow, the professors, and I probably would include myself in this, when we're talking about what we learned from students, somehow it seemed a lot hazier than the students were talking about. So I can't quite articulate that, but it still, maybe it's on the burner or maybe it's back in the refrigerator, but it never went anywhere, yeah.

Zhang: I hope that will be-- (continues to speak)

Carson (speaking simultaneously): It's an interesting topic, isn't it? Yeah, it really is.

Zhang: So, what other area of research in children's literature or women's studies, uh, you have few mentioned here.

Carson: Well, in children's literature I mostly just enjoy teaching it, so I haven't written on it, and probably won't. My major publication research, or research for publication, has been on Eudora Welty and Anne Tyler; I still enjoy Anne Tyler in particular. I've published on, you know, other people, too: the transcendentalists and Katherine Anne Porter, and so forth, and on pedagogy. Right now, my interest, my project is working on a little-known novel by a British, an Anglo-American, or-- I don't know, it's hard to figure out what he his nationality identification should be. But anyway, it's a man named William Williams who wrote a novel called *Penrose*, the journal of Louelle (??), a Penrose Mariner, and uh, was written somewhere, probably finished in draft by 1775. He died in 1797, I think, so somewhere between there, 1775 and 1797. It was published in a bastardized version in 1815, and then again, more bastardized, in 1825, but it wasn't published in its original form until 1969. And it's introduced, and Howard Dickinson wrote a literary study of it, as well as edited the volume, and it sort of, you know, just disappeared. And when I recently discovered it, I became fascinated by this, what I think, as Dickinson agrees, is probably the-- has good claims to being the first American novel. It's set in the Caribbean, in Central America, but he lived in the colonies for thirty years, William Williams. He was a portrait painter, landscapist. And so-- And one scene is in Key West, so it's those tricky things that how you define America and American novels. But it's fascinating because it's very different, say, from *Robinson Crusoe*, and from other works of the period; it's very anti-slavery, almost anti-Christian, certainly anti-Christian as it's practiced during that period, raises lots of questions about war -- Spain and England are always at war during that time -- about sexuality, about attitudes toward native Americans. And unlike *Robinson Crusoe*, *Penrose* isn't trying to get back home -- or doesn't go back home to England; he marries a native woman, has children down there, and stays there, and realizes that that's the best life for him -- down there, rather than going home.

And that's-- It's a part, actually, of another interest I have and have done-- I have a manuscript on, and that's the nature of the good life in American literature. And it's one of those things I pull out and work on periodically; I always say that it's probably going to be found among my papers when I die. But I became aware that lots of my publications and my teaching in class sort of focuses on that question: you know, what is a really good life? And a lot of the answers seem to be going in the direction of-- uh, it's not the simple life -- you know, we have this kind of cliché that, "Oh, if we just got back to simplicity, everything would be okay," -- but a kind of morally, intellectually, and personally complicated life, with lots of, with connections, and having to deal with those complications. I think even in, in some ways in Thoreau, there's a recognition of that value; even though he says "simplify, simplify," there's another kind of complexity going on. So I like that irony; I'm an old new-critical person who's always attracted to the irony in literature. So, that's where my current research interest is.

Zhang: Great, thank you.

Carson: Mm hmm.

Zhang: So, I understand that you also served as the Vice President of the College of Arts and Sciences and faculty senate.

Carson: I did, several times. Not now, but yeah. I think I had two terms, yeah.

Zhang: Tell me about your college and community service experience.

Carson: I was very sneaky in college -- in committees work. I'm not crazy about committee work. But I recognize the responsibility that faculty members have -- I'm not very good at committee work, either. And so I tried to think, well, how can I serve the college without killing myself on committees that I don't like? And so I tried to choose committee work, committee assignments that I actually enjoyed, and had something to do with a real interest of mine. And so I figured that I could be an effective secretary, because I'm a pretty good detail person -- vice president, secretary. And I like the idea of being on the executive committee, because you get to sort of see what's going on in the school as a whole, gives you an overview. So that's why I was willing to accept the position of secretary vice president of the faculty for a couple of times, because it let me do what I wanted to do and still accomplish, uh, the-- fulfill my responsibilities. And the same thing about-- I accepted a position on the faculty evaluation committee, because I really enjoy honoring colleagues, and learning what they're doing in a classroom and in their professional lives. And it's hard work, but it's serving a purpose, and so I managed to, I guess at least seemed to fulfill my obligations that way, because I haven't served very often at all in faculty governance otherwise, and so I feel like I've been flying under the radar -- there have been a couple of committees, but nothing very onerous. And also, of course, by doing things like the community of learners, and serving on search committees, and so forth. I did one stint as chair of the English department, but it was going to kill me, and vowed never to do it again until everybody in the department had done it too, so-- (laughs) So I would probably admit that that may be in some ways my weakest area, and yet, I think by mentoring younger faculty members and so forth, maybe I've had my own-- and doing the teaching workshop, I've had my own contribution to the community.

Zhang: Okay, lately you've also played a very prominent role in developing the Academic Honor Code, and how we can figure out a way to hold students accountable. So, tell me about--

Carson: Actually, I think my role was very small in that, it was more supportive, and I attended meetings and discussions, but I may have been-- I think I was maybe instrumental in some ways on the early end because I was part of a group who became really concerned with standards on campus. And, uh-- We called ourselves a committee of, I forget, of thirteen or something, and we had a kind of ad hoc relationship, we would, you know, meet for lunch and sort of, "What can we do to raise the standards of Rollins?" And we opened up the discussion, invited the faculty, the whole were [can't make out], I think the first meeting, maybe sixty people came. And I'd gotten more credit than I should have, because I was again playing largely secretary to this initial group of twelve or thirteen. I wrote down what I'd heard would be the major ideas, and sort of codified a statement of academic excellence. And then over the years, I think a number of faculty members began to give this to their students, as a kind of commitment that faculty members saying, "Okay, this is the standard that I'm going to hold you to and hold myself to," so it was like, I will expect to be-- You may expect me to be in class every day, and I will expect you to be in class. I will expect you to be in class prepared, and you know. And periodically, I would, before each term for a good many years, I would send a copy out to faculty members, saying if you want to use it on your syllabus or whatever, you know, here it is. I think that one byproduct of that is, okay, now how can we hold students to a higher standard? And I think it was out of that that, I think, that Lee Lines began to work with the student life committee to work on the Honor Code, and then Pedro Bernal took a major role in that, and so I think my responsibility or my contribution was sort of several layers back, but I really applaud what they've done, and I think it stands to be a remarkable change at Rollins.

Zhang: You have worked under three -- four administrations: Seymour, or you came under Jack Critchfield?

Carson: Well, I saw it-- Seymour was here when I came officially, but I knew Jack Critchfield.

Zhang: Right. Seymour, then uh, Bornstein--

Carson: Rita, yeah.

Zhang: Now, uh, Dr. Duncan. So, can you give us a reflection of your view from the faculty perspective of the college administration?

Carson: Mmm. Uh, I remember how wonderful it was to have Thad come to Rollins. We all look back and smile now, but one of the statements he made early on was, "Rollins is going to become the Harvard of the south." And we all sort of chuckled, I think, and said, "Oh." But it gave us, wow, a sense of possibility. And when he eliminated the major in business, and declared that we were a liberal arts college, and reinstated the classics, and

began to have us associated with the great lakes colleges -- everybody says, "Oh, Kinyon. That's a peer college," and, uh-- So there was a wonderful sense of pride that began to develop with Thad, and a sense of identity of ourselves as a liberal arts institution whose peer institutions were those really good small liberal arts colleges in the country, and I think there began to be this sense of, oh, there's standards that can be raised-- that we can meet, right? That we can meet raised standards. And so Thad was just absolutely transformative in that way. And then just the spirit with which he approached his job also transformed this school. I mean, you could find him in the cafeteria doing magic tricks for the children -- [tone negating that statement] children, for the students, and during those early days, we used to have a faculty retreat to this place called Circle F Ranch over, I think near Lakeland. But it was like a dude ranch -- very rough quarters, but we would all pile into cabins and-- you know, shared cabins with our children, different couples, and play baseball together during the day and go horseback riding, at night have square dances, and Thad would do his magic show, and I remember-- One of my dearest memories is of Thad dancing with my older daughter Ashley, this was when she was about three or four, and it's -- oh! -- This little girl was being totally serious, but she loved Dr. Seymour. And so he gave the faculty, helped engender in the faculty a sense of self-respect, a sense of excellence, a desire for excellence, a sense of possibility. And so I think his role was just absolutely crucial.

And then Rita transformed the school in other ways. Initially we thought, oh, she's going to be a great fundraiser, and she was, I mean, absolutely fantastic, you can look around the campus and see all the buildings that she had brought us to show the difference she made. But she also transformed the school in its ideas about excellence, and she began to emphasize even more and more publication, and academic excellence-- or the professional excellence among the faculty as well as teaching. She was wonderful because she knew her faculty, I think, intimately; she knew what every one of us -- I suspect she knew what every one of us was working on, every time she would see me, she would ask about my latest project or something that was happening in the classroom, or some project I was working on in the community. So she has-- she changed the school in her own way, and quite different from Thad. And Duncan I think is going to make changes too; I can't, you know, I think you can't see that until we get to the other end, so I'm going to be interested to, fifteen years from now to look back and see what he's done, but yesterday in the all-college faculty meeting, he was announcing plans to renovate Ward Hall, and that sounds marvelous, and certainly the programmatic changes, the international initiatives that he's brought to Rollins, is fantastic, so-- I mean they are fantastic, so it's going to be exciting. And then every time, I think, we're surprised. And in previous years, it's been pleasantly surprised; I hope this works out that way, too.

Zhang: So in your professional career, you decided to be endowed here at Rollins; you also received the Hugh McKean award, Cornell distinguished teaching award, and also [can't make out]. Uh, several others. Also, I remember you were selected as commencement speaker back in '86; tell me about that experience.

Carson: Yeah, yeah. I loved that, that was really wonderful. I guess it was kind of a combination nomination with the students and faculty. I love that -- it was during Thad's tenure, and instead of inviting big people in to give the commencement speech, faculty

members gave it, and it was so personal, I just love that tradition because we knew the students, we could directly address them, so-- I loved listening to the speeches of my colleagues, and so I was very honored to give that speech. I also remember being very nervous when I gave it. But it was a good speech, I thought, and I think it was-- It was also about, I think, life's complexity, learning to view things from a variety of angles, which I think is one of the developmental tasks that our students face at college: they learn how lines sometimes blur, that things are not always as clear-cut as they thought they were when they were seventeen. And it was a good challenge, I enjoyed that.

Zhang: That's actually, under Hamilton Holt we already had that tradition--

Carson: I did-- Really? I didn't know that. So Thad-- Because that's the other thing, Thad was so aware of the history of the college that he made us aware of our heritage. So that doesn't surprise me in the least that he would bring up something, uh, reinstitute something that Hamilton Holt had done. Yeah, I forgot, that was a wonderful thing that Thad did for us. Even find-- And he always got so tickled over things like finding the original chair that Ham-- that the original president had sat in when he conferred agree-- Is that it? Right there, there you go! And I love that, and I love his sense of ritual, and the importance of ritual to an institution. I learned a-- I continue to learn from Thad. He teaches now in the classroom right next to mine at eleven o'clock, and almost every day he'll have something he'll come out and say: "Oh, have you read this poem?" or "Here's an article I want you to see!" He's a great man. He is one of the world's great men.

Zhang: Yeah. On the wall, the picture -- You must be on this picture,

Carson: Ohh! You know, I don't, I think I was on sabbatical right here, because I think that's-- That was the centennial, is that right?

Zhang: Yes, yeah.

Carson: Yeah. And I think I was in England that semester, so I don't believe I'm in that, which is too bad.

Zhang: That picture is modeled after Holt.

Carson: Holt did the same-- That's right, that panorama. That's right. See? That's what I mean, Thad was always thinking of that. Yeah, that's great.

Zhang: Now look back. How do you view your Rollins career?

Carson: Ah. I love-- I was going to say every minute of it, but I'm sure that's not the case, but, uh-- I cannot imagine being at a place other than Rollins that would have given me more joy, allowed me to create more joy for myself. It turned out just absolutely serendipitously to be, I think, the best place for me to use my own talents and skills, and the best place to foster my strengths without forcing me to play to parts of myself that seem dissonant with what I was really about. It allowed me-- Well, I mean by that, I guess, it allowed

me mostly to teach. It encouraged me to do research and publishing, but didn't force me to consider that the center of my life. And it valued me for being a teacher, rather than making me feel as if I should be apologetic because that was the center of my life. And I don't think that would have happened at a state university, uh, a very large university. I am so grateful to have been here when Thad was here, when Rita was here; I'm so totally grateful for the students who every day teach me something; for colleagues who allowed, who respected my independence and many of whom have become good friends. It's just been an absolutely wonderful professional life, and I'm very, very grateful for it.

Zhang: Uh, now what's your plan after retirement?

Carson: Yeah! Uh, a day at a time, I guess. I don't have-- I know that people tend to want to be able to say, well, I have this academic project, and I probably will do a little work, continue to work on William Williams; maybe I'll, you know, continue to pull out that manuscript on the good life, but mostly, right now I'm thinking about, I want to develop other parts of myself, uh, that I haven't developed in the past. You know, certainly that doesn't mean what I had had, there's anything wrong with that, but now there's a great possibility for other things, so I want to read lots of history. I want to learn Spanish. I want to travel a lot. I want to go to the concerts. I want to listen to music. I want to, somewhere along the road, play with grandbabies. But mostly I want to find out what it's like to be this person I am at this stage of my life, and how I can most completely be that person. I think I've done a good job of being the person at the other stages of my life, and I think this stage calls for new things, but I'm not quite sure yet what it is; I want to find out. But I'm really excited about it.

Zhang: That sounds like a good plan.

Carson: Yeah! Because no plan. That's the best plan of all maybe sometimes, be open to life, and be ready to accept what comes.

Zhang: Great. Uh, Barbara, I really want to thank you for all your contribution to Rollins College.

Carson: Aw, thank you, Wenxian.

Zhang: --And thank you for helping us document our liberal arts education here; I've really enjoyed conversation with you.

Carson: You're so kind, you made it easy. Thank you, thank you very much.