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Kenneth Stevens, August 21, 2018

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Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral Histories

Oral History Interview with Kenneth Stevens (KS)

Conducted by Historic Preservation Graduate Student Matt Jones, (MJ) and University Archivist Alexis Braun Marks (ABM)

Transcribed by Historic Preservation Graduate Student Rachel Burns

MJ: I'm recording. This Matt Jones, grad student here at EMU, along with University Archivist Alexis Braun Marks, and it's Tuesday, August 21st here at Halle Library. We're here today to speak with Kenneth Stevens, who served with the Communication and Theater Arts Department currently Communication, Media, and Theater Arts Department, from 1973 until his retirement in 2007?

KS: '14.

MJ: '14, okay I have it here to ask when you retired and I skipped it. During that time, Stevens created the graduate and undergraduate programs in Arts Management, directed hundreds of plays and musicals, was a ten-time winner of the faculty recognition awards, received the EMU Gold Medallion Award, and the Teaching Innovation Award. Outside of teaching at EMU, Stevens has also served as Associate Director of the Cherry County Playhouse in Traverse City, producer at the Red Barn Theater in Saugatuck, MI, as well as Director of the Actors Repertory Theater in Las Vegas, and President of the Michigan Theater Association, among others. We usually start off with a little background, where you're from and your family.

KS: Born and raised in Cincinnati. Got an undergraduate degree in political science and then got a fellowship for a graduate degree in public administration. From about my junior year in high school on, I became very involved in theater. I went to an all-boys catholic school, and was doing very poorly, just surviving. I got lucky because, for some reason, I really loved math, and I couldn't read. I hated reading, but I loved math. Once they realized I was pretty good at math, they say "Ken, qualify to go into a college prep program." But if you go in the college prep program have to be in the high end lit classes too. So I walked into a lit class with Clarence Rivers, a priest. Again, I was really a slow reader and still am today which turns out to be a real benefit when you direct theatre, because you envision everything. You read so slowly that you envision everything. I can read a play and the first time through I have blocked it. I've worked harder at getting it better. Anyhow, Clancy, which was his nickname, was a very unique guy, at the time he was the only black priest in that diocese. He took full advantage of the fact that he was the only one in that he said "I want to do this", and somebody might say "well geez, Father Rivers-" he says "no, I want to do it, you want to tell me I can't do it?" He started a little theatre program there and it was extremely successful. During my junior year,

when I was in Romeo and Juliet, he made me stand up. He made us all memorize the sonnets, if you can imagine that. We had to stand up and recite them. Anyhow, the important thing was that he did an adaptation of Romeo and Juliet and took it to the state competition. It won the competition, and he took it back to the school which was really all about athletics. It was all athletics. He said "Guys in the play get a day off, right?" and the school said no. He said "when the football team wins they get a day off, right?" He said "It's gonna happen." There were two different colors of letters, there were gold letters and there were red letters. Gold was for athletics and red letter was for the second class letter for arts and lit. He bought us all gold letters and had us put on our jackets. That's the type of person he was, very innovative. A musician as well, he wrote the first African American mass, recorded it, started his own recording company, his own publishing company. He designed jewelry, designed clothes, a very independent guy. So I got really hooked on this stuff. When I went to University of Cincinnati, it was political science so for the first year or so I did not get involved in theatre. A friend of mine from high school called me up and said "look, you've taken all of the dance lessons," this was back when boys had to take dance classes starting in the seventh grade, he said "you are a good dancer, well we need you." He was a dancer in the Cincinnati Ballet Company. They were doing opera- *Salome*. He called me up and said "you can do the dance and stuff. We need more boys for *Salome*. It's nothing really special. You just need to get out in this one number and you need to lift her." We did that and then the choreographer said "well you know the next show up is *Suzanna*-" which is set in Appalachia, she said "you have square dance on your resume." I said yes. So I became a member of a ballet company and actually got my first paid job as a performer. Then, back at the University, he called me up at the University again and said "Say, they are bringing in a show boat from West Virginia and there doing a show on it, again we need boys." It is hard to get male dancers, because most men don't think that dance is a cool thing to do. Again, I went down to the showboat, it was a little musical called *The Boyfriend*. I did that show and I was so taken by that show that I stopped going to school. It was my sophomore year, first semester and I racked up a good 1.75 ERA, which is not bad for not having gone to any classes. The head of the theatre, a guy named Paul Rutledge, said "You are out of here unless you get better grades." So I did, I got better grades. It was after that I was working for the City of Cincinnati. Paul called me up and said "we have the chance to buy an old showboat." No actually, the first step was he called me up and said "Say, the Rockefeller Foundation just did this major study, they're funding a few big time fellowships for anybody that is really interested in the arts and have experience in the arts and are interested in administration." He said "you qualify, you want to do it? 100% full ride, books, you get stipend, travels, the works, you get it all, and you get a job at the Cincinnati Playhouse when you're done." I said "I'll do that" When I was at the Cincinnati Playhouse after going back and getting your master's in arts administration. Then he called me up and said "we have a chance to buy a showboat, do you want to go in with me on it?" We bought an old showboat, the last showboat built, the Showboat Majestic. It was down in Indiana. We brought it up. We both got every credit card we could possibly get our hands on and maxed them out to make it work. I moved onto the showboat because I couldn't afford rent at the point. I

spent that winter painting it, putting down carpet, getting it up to speed. We opened and by the end of the season we were able to say that we made a little bit of money. I continued to run the showboat. Fortunately, Paul went on sabbatical and said "How would you like to teach my classes while I am on sabbatical?" So I did that. And then in 1972, one March afternoon, the tugboat I was living on- we had a showboat and the tugboat. I gutted the engine down and I turned it into a really cool apartment, it burned down. Now I had to make enough money to pay rent and I wasn't going to be doing that there. So I sent out resumes, and Eastern was the first to respond. I came up and did the interview. Before we bought the showboat, I'd agree to work with my third mentor Ruth Bailey, who founded the Cherry County Playhouse. She was a spectacular producer. She had offered me a marketing position at the playhouse but then we bought the showboat and I said no. When it looked like Michigan was a possibility, I called Ruth up and said "Are you still interested in me?" And she said "Yeah, sure." So I was able to come to Eastern and during the summers, work in the playhouse. After a couple of years she wanted to sell it. I tried to buy it, I didn't have the money, and then a television entertainer at the time, Pat Paulson, did buy it. But she sold it to him saying that he would have to take me on as an associate producer. So, that worked out. I was pretty well into a career at the point. So that's how I got here.

MJ: How did that boat burn down?

KS: It is a really horrid story. There are two funny things about it. But how it burned down was the way I had it set up. I had a big shop where the engine room was. I turned it into a laundry and a workshop. What happened, according to the fire inspector, at the end of it he said "well here's what caused it." I had a cat, and the cat lived on the showboat, and the cat had a litter box. The litter that I was using, absorbed mineral spirit fumes. I went to meet Paul at a bar to talk about the upcoming season. So I threw some laundry in the dryer and went up to the Cricket Bar. When the dryer-the air pulled across because of the dryer and started a spontaneous combustion. Because it was all enclosed in that engine room, it wasn't even noticeable for hours, by the time I had heard somebody say the public landing was closed because of a fire, I figured it was the boat behind us. So I said I am going to call to see if they need help. I called and I said "I live on the showboat." And the guy said "Don't worry about it, it's just some tugboat behind the showboat." Got in the car and raced down, this is the other funny thing. Actually there were two great stories that day. It was so cold- an awful misty March day. Raced down there, jumped down, I see flames coming up, they already cut holes the roof because there was 2,000 gallons of fuel oil in the hold. They weren't messing around. So I finally I got up and ran, I ran up to the barricade and said "this is my home!" Walking back on the deck, a firefighter came down the steps from the second deck of the tugboat. He said "I got your television set." About a month earlier I had done an industrial show for Proctor and Gamble and part of the way they paid me was that I could have anything on the set that I wanted and it was up to me, what I took. I went to an art gallery, I bought a Picasso charcoal and had it. It was a real Picasso! It's just funny, the guy saved the television, it's a stupid television set. Get the painting! Too late,

all gone. To end the day, everybody's gone, they got the fire out, I am standing there alone on the deck of the showboat, this gorgeous collie comes sort of wandering across the public landing, when you see a dog when it is out of place and its lost. I'm rambling here. I called the collie and came up and it came up the gang way, I looked at this collie, it was beautifully maintained. It had an address in Indian Hill. That is *the* neighborhood in Cincinnati. Millionaire row, just gigantic mansions. I guess it has a silver lining. I went up to a telephone called the number, the woman was just like "this is so wonderful. Thank you so much" I have a millionaire coming down to get her favorite dog. About 20 minutes later this huge Lincoln pulls up, she gets out, she is loving the dog, "thank you so much," she gave me five dollars and left. So I got out the resumes and wound up in Ypsilanti, Michigan. There's the whole story.

MJ: You said in an interview I was reading that you were shocked at how good the department was here when you got here. Why were you shocked?

KS: Well, it wasn't known particularly as a big school, it wasn't a big school. If you'd seen what it looked like at the time, it wasn't even a campus. Forest Street ran all the way through, it was just a scattering of buildings. Every department, if you are lucky, goes through one of these periods where just the right people are on the faculty, the right people are in the administration, the right people are coming as students. It's just right. That's what it was. I walked in. The faculty, they were all both interested in the scholarly aspects of theater and they were very pragmatic practitioners of theatre as well. You were encouraged, I was encouraged to work professionally. A number of the faculty continued to work professionally as they served as professors as well. Eastern at the time was also very, very successful with their forensics team. A significant portion of forensics is theatre, interpretation. After-dinner is stand-up comedy. I mean, that's what it is. It has other aspects as well of public speaking, but it is really a theatrical thing. There was a guy, who was now on the board of regents, Dennis Beagen, he was new like I was and heading up the forensic team. We clearly recognized that there was enormous talent that could be used by both and when out and really recruited it. It was just right, and the university itself at the time, if they didn't encourage, they certainly accepted professional work in your field as an equivalent to scholarly work in your field. By being able to direct, not just here, but in Traverse City, I did some stuff in New York, all of that went on our resume and to the University, it was the equivalent of writing articles for journals. As such, I was able to get promoted. There was one point where I had a real choice. I was doing consulting work for what was to be a New Star System Theatre in St. Louis and I had been flying out there for a year as it was being built. One night he called me up and said "We are getting ready to incorporate and I want you to be president of this theatre operation." It was tough. But I said no, and the reason I said no was because I was here at Eastern. Everybody, all of mentors, I had three mentors, I had Clarence Rivers, I had Paul Rutledge, I had Ruth Bailey. All of them had instilled in me a commitment to teach people that you work with and to work professionally. It was perfect, I knew that if I went 100% corporate, I would lose some of the enthusiasm that I had because I wouldn't be in a position to be able to help the people that I was directing

learn stuff on their own. I said no and that pretty much committed me to Eastern. I did get a job offer from Howard, but again, I got one from Howard and one from Akron. But each time everything was going right here. By that time, we had started the Arts Management program, we had a musical theatre program going. All kinds then. Another person- two extremely important people, Larry Smith, had become Vice President of Marketing, and we really hit it off. Then as a result of that was John Porter. Both of them were incredibly supportive. When they were out looking for a way of getting Eastern involved in its first capital campaign, they solicited proposals from all of the departments. We put one in to make the Sponberg Theatre. It was relatively small, it was like a million and half or something like that. When they went to their consultants to see what would work, the consultants said "there is only one you can choose, it is the small one a million and a half. One, you have a good reputation for theatre and they're practitioners of theatre and at about a million to you will run out of support. There's not much money out there. Then I was asked "do you want to run the campaign?" And I said "sure yeah, I'll do it. Things kept happening- good stuff kept happening.

MJ: What kind of condition was the theatre in before it was renovated?

KS: Well it was just one theatre. It was just the Quirk Theatre. Still a small theatre, 381 seats. It was chugging along. It worked. But they only did four shows a year and I realized that you guys aren't doing new stuff, you are just doing the sort of classics, which is fine if you're getting decent audiences but there is more out there. Theatre was a really exciting time in the seventies, especially. I started doing shows out on the apron, without sets. Then we started another funny story. One night I got a note backstage- I was actually in a show that I directed. I got a note from a guy, Norris Houghton, "buy you a drink after the show." I said "Paul, you know a guy named Norris Houghton?" Paul goes "Oh, Norris Houghton, holy smokes! He's the biggest Russian theatre scholar there is in the whole damn country!" So I guess I will go talk to him. We really hit it off. Anyhow I wound up- he wound up sending me to the Soviet Union. The reason was he had written some journal articles that were extremely critical of Brezhnev, who was president. So they pulled his visa and he said "I have all these friends in Russia who want copies of my books and they can't get copies of my books and my journal articles." He said "no one knows you, but you are working for a university. Tell you what, I will send all of this stuff to the American Embassy in Moscow, you fly to Moscow and I will give you the contacts to these people. You go deliver this stuff around Russia." So I did, stupid. I got on the airplane I thought it would be fun and next thing I knew I was in Moscow walking through Moscow Airport. Anyhow, the whole point of the whole thing I think getting back to where I was- now I see I rambled to the point that I lost myself. One of the people that I met when I was in Moscow was a guy named Yuri Zavadsky He was a big time producer, had his own theatre. The Mossovet Theatre. He was a big-time communist. His office had a big bust of Lenin in the back, and I thought this was cool. It was funny, he was an active member of the Communist Party. He was able to get away with a little more, although they told him he could not do some of the shows that he was producing. So what he was doing a little thing in the lobby, so after the main show, there would be

these little reviews and sketches in the lobby that were pretty critical of the government. Anyhow, I loved the idea. On the same trip I went to visit some folks in Sweden and went to a showboat that had afternoon shows-lunchtime shows. Anyhow, it changed the nature of the season that we were doing. We started these afterthoughts, putting revues we would do in the lobby. We started a brown bag theatre every Thursday afternoon. The stuff became really popular and we needed another theatre basically. That's where the idea of the Sponberg came up because there was a guy named Bob McElya, who just died last week. Bob and I were sitting outside having lunch one day looking at what was going to be an amphitheater- which Michigan is really dumb for having an amphitheater, especially at a college because during the summer it stays light so long that you can't start you can't start the show till ten o'clock and during the winter it's not good to be outside. Bob said "wouldn't it be neat to enclose this?" And that's how that idea got started.

MJ: Going back to when you first arrived. I wanted to see if you could talk about any of the key members on the faculty. We've spoken to George Bird, was he here then?

KS: Sure, was George ever here. George was EMU theatre. He was the first to direct shows. I just mentioned Bob McElya, brilliant performer, early on,

MJ: He was on my list here.

KS: Early on, I don't know where, a guy in the dance department wasn't here very long. We were talking to him one day and he said "Noel Coward is really hot right now. Let's do a Noel Coward review." That was when this afterglow thing started. He said "let's do it as this afterglow idea." Bob and I and a grad student put together this idea, a three-person review. We then wound taking it all over the place, including a campus to open an art gallery out in Northern Illinois or Southern Illinois. He was an amazingly brilliant performer. He was also really into Japanese theater and so he did some really unique version of the plays. He did an *Oedipus* that was all kabuki, knock your socks off, brilliant. He was here, Virginia Koste, who had started the Children's Theatre program, part of the reason I got the job. When I went back to get my master's degree my thesis was a study of the social adaptation of children 9 to 11 years old who were involved in creative dramatics. I did this thesis and in the process, I had to work. I had a control group, I had kids that took creative drama and then I had group that actually performed. Anyhow, my thesis advisor was involved with children's theatre. She knew Jenny so he gave me a really good thing, that was part of it. It was a terrific children's theatre program. There was a woman named Thelma McDaniel, who was also on the faculty at the time. She was a lot like Bob. She was just theatre- she just reeked theatre of a kind that, she was a gypsy, just really fun. She had broken into my classroom one day and started shooting everyone with squirt gun, just for the hell of it in an arts management class. Jim Gousseff, who was the headed of program, was very forward looking, he too was someone who was committed to the application of scholarship. He actually was the first one to try and start a dinner theater here in the old student union. It didn't quite

catch on but it was enough that when Larry Smith said "Boy we've got this Hoyt Center up and nothing's going on in it. Would you think it would work for dinner theatre?" It was this small restaurant set up and I think it probably sat about 90 people. I said "sure, let's give it a try." We started the dinner theatre out there.

MJ: I had a question about the dinner theatre. I read that it was, maybe this was just gossip, that it was cancelled because a lot of the restaurants were upset.

KS: Oh, it's absolutely true. The first dinner theatre, they got really upset. We did it right. It was called the Prime and Players Dinner Theatre. You had a choice of prime rib or game hen or white fish, that was the entree. Everything else was pre-set. They had a great wine list, it had a bar, the works.

MJ: How many people would come? What did it hold?

KS: Ninety. It was very successful, which would sort of upset the restaurant owners in town. There we were upset about public money being used to take what they thought was their business. Then we re-opened but we re-opened it as a closed organization- as private club. You got into the club by becoming a member of Main Stage which was a donor organization. Because of that, we were able to avoid direct competition officially with them. So we're opened it that way. Again, it was very successful. We did that until Hoyt changed, they were going to use the building for different purposes. Then we ran a dinner theatre in Depot Town, in a little space down there that was part of the Depot Town center, which was a sort of a Chautauqua operation. We did theatre, there were lectures, it was a gallery, it was amazing stuff.

MJ: What's there now?

KS: It's a bank in there. The space was owned by the family that owned, Aubree's.

MJ: Linda French.

KS: That was interesting because by that time, I had met Nita Delaney and we got married. And Nita was, at the time, Associate Dean of Continuing Ed. I forgot what it's called now. They wanted a community development thing going on. She came up with this idea of having a Chautauqua-type place. Then she said "why don't you direct some shows for us here, too?" So I said sure. It was a neat little space, it only would seat maybe probably 60 people. There was where the Maize is now, was called Cady's. The deal was they would do the meal at Cady's and then come next door to the show. So that worked well because they got the drink money and we got the show. That was pretty cool too.

MJ: These questions are part of a section I had about different theatre series or programs that you helped out with or started. We discovered EMU Main Stage and the dinner theatre. You lobbied for the creation of an arts plaza in 1981?

KS: yeah.

MJ: I read that in the Echo. I was wondering if it had been implemented and where it would have been.

KS: No. We got so close just before I retired. We got really close. I said "you've got the music building, the theatre building, College of Technology, and at the time Goddard Hall was and still is vacant. I had by then convinced at least some people of two things. One, that in the College of Technology and in the College of Arts and Science, we were duplicating efforts and we were isolating ourselves from the opportunity to move forward with Arts and Entertainment Technology. The Art Department was teaching animation. The College of Technology was teaching animation. The College of Technology had 3D printers and taught graphic communication and the Art Department taught graphic design. It's the same thing. Two sides of the same thing. I am convinced that there is a total symbiotic relationship between math, sciences, arts, and technology. Absolutely believe that. I was able to convince enough people. Actually Morell Boone, who was the first dean of this library, was one of them, and he went on to become the Dean of the College of Tech. He went for the idea. They had hospitality, they had everything. I said why don't we turn this corner of this campus, these two corners of campus, four corners really. Think of this campus with two important corners and both of them are a front door for the public. One of them is one the northwest. It's the athletic front door. It's the only place that you get the public coming visiting campus. The other reason you get the public coming on the campus is when they come to a recital or a play and they come sometimes to art galleries. The art gallery is buried in Ford Hall, so they don't come very happily. So we started this idea of saying what if we made this corner of campus an arts and entertainment center. The Art Department would move into Goddard, it really was the Construction Program in the College of Technology. We all use the same equipment, we buy the same saws, we buy the same drills, the same welders. I said why don't we have one big shop? Let folks in the arts and technology work together, and I can guarantee you, once they start working together, they're each going to stimulate each other for more imaginative work. The first step was to just get in people's heads. So that's when they renamed that little driveway Arts Center Drive. Then a little while later, we got people to go for this idea of the Crossing Lines, the design expo that they do every year now. That was getting people excited. Morrell Boone was still dean at the time, Dennis Beagen was Department Head. We got to the point where the University hired an architect. The idea was to design a special architectural feature that would bring those four buildings together- would join them. There were designs done. Then things changed. I think the first thing was Morrell as dean. You really have to have a dean if you're gonna get to the ear of the president or to a regent. Morell retired. Then Dennis retired. The momentum that we had dissipated, particularly because of Morell's

retirement. It was funny because the regents had at one time identified it as the next capital investment after Strong. It had been coming up- but it didn't. I still think it would have made a big difference in the University. WEMU we planned to move over. We were going to open a dinner theatre and a restaurant operation for hospitality. The plans were really cool. Art Timko retired from WEMU. These were people who recognized or believed that the university has very few front doors and without the support of the public, you don't go very far. WEMU is there, the only thing out there that's daily-24 hours a day that says Eastern Michigan University. Had it been moved over and expanded a little bit, increase its power, shoot its signal further into Detroit, it would have really taken off. It has decent Detroit connection. Linda Yohn retiring hurt the Detroit connect, just at a time when Detroit's booming.

MJ: Little a bit of gear switch here. Did you create the Encore Musical Company?

KS: Yes. Once again, the idea for that started with Jim Gousseff trying to do the dinner theatre. Part of that deal of that dinner theatre was that he convinced somebody that it should be done by graduate students and they should get a stipend for it. It didn't go, but a couple years later the idea that it was still there. The proposal was that we put together a company of eight graduate students. I think it was eight, maybe six. They each get an assistantship, because they were working to build graduate program in theatre too. I said "instead of waiting for people to apply, how about ad backstage and go audition people in New York." So I did. We got a neat range of people from New York, got someone from Louisville, Kentucky to be the music director of it. Couple of students from here. Dennis Cockrum, already here, a very successful actor. We put it together and called it the Encore Company. They did some of the dinner theatre, we also made these students available to any faculty member in the College of Arts and Science who wanted or thought that we could somehow theatricalize their classes, the content. For example, in Political Science, they study The House on American Activities Committee. We got the transcripts from Congress, and put together a show. A 45 minute piece that would be done in the classroom, that would illustrate the workings of The House on American Activities Committee and what they did.

ABM: How many faculty members took you up on that offer?

KS: Quite a few (laughs). Sometimes we got in trouble. I would guess we were probably doing a dozen a semester which took some work because the students were putting these together too. This is very funny. The History Department wanted one. They had a history day when they brought high school kids in. The head of the department called and said "could you guys do something?" I said "yeah, we could do something but what are your thoughts?" I said "why don't we do an original vaudeville show?" We'll do an original vaudeville show for them. (Laughter) Dennis Cockrum, who had a wonderful sense of humor. We did it. But the sketches we did were from another faculty member who was fantastic: Parker Zellers. Parker was really into burlesque, old burlesque. The really bad the off color sketches that are hysterically funny. So Cockrum writes this thing

about Cleopatra and her ass. You know where this is going. Oh my god, the head of the department wrote this most scathing letter. But all the kids are loving it. They're going "yay!" These are high school seniors. It didn't do real well. We got a scathing letter to our department head, who said don't worry about it. We did all different kinds of stuff. We continued to do that kind of thing even after we lost the assistantships. Like when the science thing open over here. We did a whole program down there where the rocks are its really cool. I had a dancer do choreography all around those rocks. It was really cool because you could stand above and you could see choreography from a different point of view. We continued to do that stuff. That's where I learned that Mark Jefferson had a huge influence on the history of the world and continues to do because Mark drew lines at the Versailles Treaty and created this wonderful little countries like Iraq and Iran and said "these are our new borders." He said "what do you guys who won the war want?" and he said "okay that's yours." We're still living with his lines.

MJ: I wanted to jump into the Arts Management Program. First off, what was the need for this program? How did you decide that EMU needed it?

KS: Somebody needed it. It was 1965 or something. It was when the National Endowment of the Arts was established. With that came just an explosion of regional arts. They all just popped up. The cover of *Life Magazine* in the late sixties was dedicated to all of the growth of the artist. Amazing growth of the arts in the country, a neat little fact, it wasn't until the Bolshoi Ballet toured the United States and the Soviet Union was getting the credit for being this great cultural hub, that the folks in Congress and then the Johnson Administration were able to convince enough folks in Congress "the Russians are getting all this credit, we better get some art out there." They hired Duke Ellington to tour the Soviet Union. He was there by the way when I was there for delivering books under the counter in the Soviet Union. Got to meet him one night. I was Leningrad, and I was delivering books to the Leningrad Library. I knew he was in town because the cultural officer in Moscow had told me that he was going to be real busy with Duke Ellington. I didn't know his schedule. I bought some tickets to go to the Kirov Ballet one night and I was sitting there and before the ballet started all of a sudden I hear this rumbling in the back of the house. This applause grows and grows and then the curtains goes up and the dancers are on stage applauding. Here comes Duke Ellington down the aisle. It was a very moving experience. Back to-

MJ: We were talking about the need for it

KS: Yeah, the need. The Rockefeller brothers funded this study that said that all of these new companies were in desperate need of more sophisticated management. That's how I got the fellowship to go back to school and get that done. So when I came here, Eastern was in really bad shape as a university in the early seventies. Enrollments were crashing, it didn't have any money, there was talk at the state level of closing Eastern and using the dorms for prisons. It was really the case. It really created an atmosphere of need. So I made this proposal. At the time, I just had to look around and go "geez, we

offer all the classes for an Arts Management program, if someone just put it together and called it the Arts Management program.” So I made the proposal to call it the Arts Management curriculum, took classes in the College of Business and all of the arts stuff and journalism and just took all of the classes, put them together and said “there it is. Won’t cost any money to do it. Why don’t you do it?” And I said “okay, let’s do it.” It attracted students. So a few years later we said “well if it’s attracting students why don’t we make it a major?” Then the University of Michigan was trying to start a graduate program. They were not having any success because the people in CSA [College of Arts and Sciences] and the people in the College of Business couldn’t see that they had a great deal to gain by working together at the University of Michigan. They were healthy. Eastern was not healthy, it was in need. I went to the College of Business and go “Hey you can get us more students. We’ll do that.” It really was a simply a matter of credit hour production. If you could show them more credit hour production you could go for it. That’s how it happened. It worked. We got more students. Then the idea of a graduate program came up but we laid it off for the University of Michigan assuming they could have one they could pull it together. We started one.

MJ: Were there any core elements to the program when it was started? What did you want students to know?

KS: I wanted them to really know...now I’ll start talking business talk. I wanted them to know and be passionate about their product which mean they had to love dance, they had to love art history, they had to love theatre. They had to love it all and they had to understand that all of the arts and literature were all the same thing. They all addressed the same human needs and as such, if they were going to market and manage this stuff, the first commitment had to be that they had to love what they-not just their own little discipline, but the arts in total. That was one feature, they had to take course in all of the art departments. The second core feature was that they had to be able work with marketers, managers, administrators in all other industries. They had to speak their language too. They then had to take classes in marketing and management. They had to learn the languages of all of the people that they would be dealing with if they were trying to operate a business. It was mostly oriented toward not for profit because it involved almost all of theatres, dance companies were not for profit. I think a feature is still part of it is that the only difference between for-profit and not-for-profit from a business standpoint is that not for profit gives you the opportunity to have more income streams because you can get donations from individuals-you can get grants. But then of course, you have to learn to speak that language too. But it’s basically you offering somebody something that hopefully they recognize a need for and be willing to pay for it, whether or not it’s volunteering or if it’s making a donation or giving you a grant. But the end goal is the same thing- a successful business that is offering its customers what they really want.

MJ: I read that by 1988, I think 35 students had graduate from the program. 13 students initially sounds small since 1975. Did many students drop out or get out of there? Is there an ideal student to take Arts Management?

KS: Well yeah. One, they have to that passion.

MJ: Do they all come in expecting to have to love everything like that? Or do they think they can get by on their own time?

KS: Some people came in because they really wanted to act or dance or paint or sculpt or whatever and their parents wouldn't let them. They would go "I can take Arts Management and then I could tell them it's management. I'm taking some business classes, then they'll support me." Some of did that, they usually didn't finish. If we were good at what we were doing, some of them said "wow, this is a lot neater than I thought it would be and I want to do it." I suppose that the next thing that makes it rewarding is that you get to make this stuff happen and you get to do it sort of anonymously if that makes sense. You get to stand in the back of the house and go "I made that happen." But people aren't looking at you. I don't know if that makes sense, but it's the satisfaction that it's happening. Those people are working because of me and I don't have to be in the limelight. I can just do it and not-people aren't gonna worry about me. There's no celebrity involved. A lot of people love celebrity, but then there are a lot of people who don't like celebrity and the last thing they want is celebrity. So it's more fun to just go back.

MJ: It sounds like the job of the theatre-loving introverts.

KS: Yeah! And it's not just theatre, its dance, and music and literature. The one thing I always thought that the country made a mistake- congress made a mistake by putting literature under the humanities and not making lit and theatre. Literature is an important art. Poetry, fiction- mean geez, this stuff is really big time stuff. It's an art and it's a shame that it got separated that way.

MJ: When you were building that program, were there any prevailing theories in Arts Management that you were using at the time, or were you just going from your own experience?

KS: I was going entirely from my own experience. There weren't many programs around. There were a few graduate programs scattered here and there. They all had personality. If you look around, even still today, you'll find them in colleges of arts and science, you'll find them in business schools, Sangamon State- it's in their political science department. NYU it's in the ed. school. It's sort of wherever the few of us in sixties said-wherever we landed we said "let's start this program." I think Ohio State has it in the ed. school now, least their grad program is. I think each one has developed because of the experience of the founder. Now that it is a recognized field, yeah there's a lot more theory and there's

professional journals, national conferences. Where Eastern stands in that, I'm pleased to say, is that we are still, from the beginning, looked at as applied research essentially. That it is, in fact, a business. We're very entrepreneurial. The program itself continues to have that entrepreneurial spirit to it. Most folks come here because they really do hope to manage. I think it's very entrepreneurial. Today, it's moving even more in that direction as the popularity of not-for-profits has waned some. Hopefully that will come back some time in the future. There's certainly a recognition here of the market that's out there that recognizes that the arts and technology and math and science have a symbiotic relationship. I'll give you- who's the construction management-

MJ: I'm not sure

KS: He's the head of the construction management program. He's the head advisor for constructors student organizations. Back when we were starting this idea of an arts thing, I made appointments to people in the College of Technology. Jim Stein. I said "the reason I'm here is because I think we're in the same business. You guys have built stuff and we over in the theatre build stuff. We could be very helpful to one another." We talked for a while and I said "this is what we do over in the theatre." This was years ago and he said "Wow, you just helped me understand something. I've had a student that is really big-time down in Florida, heading all of the construction stuff for Disney. I couldn't figure what it is that we teach that makes sense that he would be working for Disney." I said "because they build stuff! They design things and fill them." He was the first in the College of Technology to really get behind this idea of a design expo and stuff. It was sort of an eye opener. I think that the recognition- out there in the world, that's the way things are. People who work in sound engineering are also working in design. Design is this unifying construct that brings together the arts and the science and technology. It's design. I will be opening a place called Villa Bar over in Novi on the 12th of October. It's the former residence of an artist named David Barr. Most people don't know all of his work which is all over the world but they know one piece and it's the big stainless arch on Hart Plaza. David, I met him in 1995 by accident and we became really close friends and worked together. He founded the Michigan Legacy Art Park up northwest near Interlochen and I wound up being president of that. He's a philosopher, he's an amazing artist, mathematician, scientist. His brain all of it works together. You want to read book of his, it's called *Crossing Lines* which is the title for the design expo. It's called the Crossing Lines Expo. But the idea is that as soon as you start crossing lines, you learn stuff. Lines are a fascinating thing. We're nature. Our behavior is a natural, it's a part of the natural environment. We have very bizarre behaviors. A lot of them have to do with this line business. My favorite to illustrate is to take a drive in Detroit and drive Jefferson Avenue out to where it crosses Alter. You'll be driving from Detroit into Grosse Pointe Park. Unbelievable. How can you draw a line and say "if you live on this side of the line, you're gonna be poor. But if you live on this side of the line-" how do we do that? It's fascinating. It's part of nature and to understand that we're doing this stuff-it's really the social implications but as soon as you start comparing it with- you start looking at things like tangents or Fibonacci sequence of numbers or the golden mean, the golden triangle

or the rectangle, plutonic solids. You start getting into this stuff, it's just absolutely fascinating how it is all woven into this fabric. That's part of it. We're pushing ways of helping people understand and weave that fabric in positive ways, if that makes sense. I leave here, I got a 1:30 meeting, where we'll be working with the students doing the opening of Villa Barr, there will be the docents and I'll be planning classes for them. Then we will meet with Connie Smith and try to develop something to take the Arts Management program here and at the graduate level, create an international arts management program that has the institute would be here and in a couple other countries and have as its goal to promote international collaboration in the arts and humanities. Nobody has that yet. Nobody had an arts management program in the seventies. I hope that there will be a growing recognition that as our country becomes more politically isolated there will be more recognition for the need for cultural understanding through the arts because we will be phenomenology isolated. We already are. There's virtually no cultural exchange going on. I gotta tell you that experience in Leningrad-there those Russian were just going nuts over Duke Ellington. What understanding-it's an amazing thing. So I hope that we are successful at that.

ABM: Can I ask you a question Ken?

KS: Sure.

ABM: If it's too personal you can choose not to answer it but in listening to you talk, it's clear that you still have a deep passion for the program and you're still involved in the program. You're still connected with the university. What was it that led you to retire in 2014 because it sounds like your work isn't quite done?

KS: Well, because I wanted to work more doing this kind of thing and less dealing with the complexities of- dealing with navigating university- I don't like to use this word in this way. Universities are huge, big institutions, run mostly by people who have become specialists in their field. It just takes a lot of work, a lot of time, a lot of energy to try to promote collaboration if you're in the system. I was 70 years old. I had enough money. I was professor, good lord. I know people don't think it, but it's the best job in the world. You got security, you got people give you respect and stuff because you're a professor. You make a good living. I've been a professor starting back at the University of Cincinnati started putting money into TA Kreff. I could retire. I could say then that I don't have to go this meeting, or that meeting, and I don't have to write this report or that report, which takes an awful amount of time. I can just work with people that want to do it. Things have changed. I would never would get hired here today. Larry Smith wouldn't be hired here today because neither one of us have PhDs and that's essential to get hired here today. At the time, it wasn't. One, I really want to work to help promote David's stuff. He was a spectacular person and if this thing goes in Novi we'll be doing the same thing we did up north, working with school systems, getting the kind of stuff that we do. Give you an example, we do a lot of projects. This is one of my favorite projects. We went into Traverse City school system; the sixth grade I think it was, maybe

fifth grade. We wound up working with a lit teacher, their science teacher-life science teacher, and theatre and art. All teachers in this school system. The kids studied the anatomy and behavior of birds-local birds. Then they wrote poetry or plays as their bird from the point of view of the bird. Then they had to create sculptures of their bird using only the natural materials their bird would use make nests. Then we put all of those out in the middle of the art park in the forest and had an opening of a gallery for all of these kids. They learned all this stuff. I get to do this kind of thing on my own time and nobody saying "oh you have to have the latest assessment report done by Thursday."

ABM: Don't forget your annual activity report.

KS: Yeah, all of that stuff. I didn't mind it. I enjoyed doing that stuff. I did well enough that I kept getting good results. But at some point you have to go "Hey you know. I think I want to do this other stuff."

ABM: Thank you.

MJ: Personally, I'm glad that you pursued some many collaborations with other departments. I think I'm gonna be in the Arts Management Program in the next couple of semesters. I'm in Historic Preservation.

KS: You talk about symbiotic relationships, it's nuts not to.

MJ: But like so many guys, I don't want to do any dance.

KS: I understand that. It's really exciting stuff. I can't imagine. You've met with Susan?

MJ: I haven't gotten that far. It's just been suggested to me.

KS: Talk to Susan, talk to Elaina. Elaina is my 1:30 meeting today. Another thing that is neat is that September 22nd, taking Elaina's class downtown to Detroit and doing the Murals in the Market with them which is really fascinating. We did it last year and it was real successful. Historic Preservation, Public Administration, Art, all of this-it's what makes a place that place.

MJ: You can't have one without the other.

KS: Yeah. The sense of place-I know it's a hot item right now. It's incredibly important and we've lost so much of that sense of place by becoming consumers. Dumb thing. It's a rule if you take my marketing class you're never allowed to use the word consumer because we're not consumers. You want to sit back and consume? Fine. But make stuff.

MJ: We're kind of winding down here. There's one question I want to ask about a review I read in 1982, it was of *Kiss Me, Kate*. The author of the review wrote that "performers

throw themselves into their performances with the devil may care abandon that never seems to surface in University of Michigan productions." A lot of our interviewees have blamed the proximity of U of M for the sort of inferiority complex that Eastern suffers from. That kind of flew in the face of it, and I was happy to read it.

KS: I guess one of your questions was what makes Eastern special and that was it. I remember that review. There's a guy named Franz Harari who if you read the review, you might remember the name. Franz, he played the lead male lead in it. Great singer. I'm trying to get him an honorary degree from Eastern because he left Eastern before he graduated. He sent a proposal to a singer and said "I can do all of the illusions you want for your tour." It was Michael Jackson. Michael Jackson said "come do it." He did it. People in this country don't know him very well. He's probably one of three or four magicians in the world that are really well known. Does most of his work in Asia, China, Shanghai. He has his own huge theatre-I always forget the island, Portugal used to own it, China owns it now, it's not Manoi. Google him sometime, you'll be amazed at what he does. Franz Harari. He started a foundation to support street performers in India. I didn't realize that street performers were a caste in India, a low one. He did that. CNN has a really long interview with him. It's huge. He's amazing. We were doing new stuff, we were doing new stuff with old stuff. I think that- shoot Nita ought to be here. We're married because of this stuff. She was at University of Michigan and some friends of her said-she had just gone through a divorce, and they said "you gotta get out of the house and do something. Come to see a play over at Eastern." She said "why should I go?" They said "no really, they do great stuff." So it was Three Penny Opera and I was fortunate to direct it. Bob McElya was in the afterglow of it. She came here and was just blown away. One, she says was the physicality of the show. Two, was Bob's amazing performance in the afterglow. She said "that's it man. I ought to get involved with Eastern." She wound up staying here and wound up as an associate dean in Continuing Ed. Since then, she's done all kinds of cool stuff. She went to the community foundation in Jackson, then ran the Armory Arts Center in Jackson. It's a big live work space for artists. During all the foreclosure stuff, she head the statewide program to limit foreclosures and now she's on the board of the National Hospital Association. Arts Management Student.

MJ: What kept you here for 34 years?

KS: People kept saying "Okay, we can do that." It's that simple. What kept me here was the people like Larry Smith, like John Porter. People who you throw your ideas out there and they said "okay, try it." We went started the Beaux Arts Festival, Larry was a big supporter of that when we did the Beaux Arts Festival. We wanted to do this big Beaux Arts Ball. We first started doing them in Hoyt and then wound up doing them in the old student union ballroom. Nita and I went into the Hoyt kitchen and we just said "hey this is what we are going to have for a midnight supper. Eggs Florentine. We're going to have these special stuffed onions." We could at the time. We would go in with the kitchen staff and work with them "here's how you make this and here's how you make that." And

nobody said anything. We ran Main Stage bus tours for Main Stage members. You could sort of fudge ticket prices because you would call and say "I'm from Eastern Michigan University we want a group price." They thought you were doing students, and I didn't say we weren't students. You would get low ticket prices for professional theatre at much reduced prices and we'd run a bus. We had a box meal on the way down with champagne and they would see the show. On the way back we would have coffee and desserts. We made all of this stuff in the little kitchen over in Quirk. We would just go in and make them. Are you kidding? They would have fits today if they saw anybody in food service who was not professional food service, particularly in a kitchen that was smaller than this room. But we would do it, and everybody would say okay, you can do it. That's what kept me here. The continued entrepreneurial spirit, time and time again. It was fun and still is which why we are getting together again. Because it's fun.

MJ: What do you think are the strengths of EMU and also the weaknesses?

KS: I think the strength of EMU right now- I think that Eastern is trying some really innovative stuff. I think that's really good whether it's push for expanded international programming, I think it's great. Playing around with the tuition is great. Getting people from out of state is great. There's good continued support for programs, individual programs.

I think they're in a serious marketing- it doesn't sound right, but I think there is a serious image problem. It's not the University of Michigan problem. You can overcome that just by being number one. People that think we are going to be number one in athletics are stupid. Well, they are. It's just dumb. It's a big weakness. It's always been a weakness. Eastern could be number one in athletics without trying very hard. All they would have to do is lower their level of participation in the money sports and start playing places like Ferris State and Wayne State and win some championships at that level. It's that simple. Identify some sports where they could really get some attention but they don't. I think that's it. The reason I say that's a weakness is because as I travel around, practically over the past several months, everybody I meet when I say I from Eastern, they say "Oh boy, Eastern sure is having a lot of trouble with wasting money." It's because of that report that shows Eastern as being out there in the lead for wasting money. That's what they say about Eastern. It's terrible. I think that's a weakness. I hope that they pendulum will swing back a little bit for Eastern to break down some of the silos that have developed. I think there's too much isolation among departments. In a university, there's always going to be competition between departments for resources. I think it's gotten a little over specialized. The last weakness, I think, is that not developing its personnel well. By that I mean it's screwing really potentially good-it's losing every year really enthusiastic lecturers who if they could be on some sort of track-there are a lot of incredibly enthusiastic adjuncts, lecturers and there's nowhere for them to go. I think that's a huge mistake because they're the ones who are gonna create the next program. Tenured faculty who are 50, 60, and 70s are not gonna be programs. They're just not gonna do it. It's the person who is sitting in the office right next to me in my little cubby hole in Goodison Hall. The excitement among those people that are right out of school-

they're getting to teach like five classes and then go over and teach one in Dearborn or something. They're gonna burn out and they've got great ideas. Anyhow, if you ask me, that's the one thing that Eastern could do to break this pattern. What it is, is bad personnel management. It's bad human resource management. You don't take your youngest people- you don't have to pay them a whole lot, but you have to give them a path to success. If they don't have that, they're gonna sit there "Christ, I'm only making \$25,000 a year for the rest of my life." You're not getting the people that are gonna make the next big step for you. So I hope that changes, I really do. I hope it doesn't become so adversarial that it can't change. I'm afraid that is happening and it becomes adversarial. It's not like you have to pay that much more. You're gonna have to pay that much more if that's the play they're going. But if they know you're here for five years, you can possibly get a tenure track position, or something's gonna happen. I guess if I were gonna make a change, first I would stop hiring people in at associate level because they do it because so and so got a PhD and got 10 or 20 years' experience. You're paying them a fortune when you could get two or three of them. It's sort of like the Tigers. The Tigers had all of these great players that couldn't play baseball to get them to a damn World Series. They paid them a fortune and they were always in last place when they closed in the past few seasons! They would pay all of this money, and now they have gotten smart and said "let's get some young people in here." Might try something different. So that's it. That's me. Thank you so much for the opportunity to do this. What happens to all this stuff?

ABM: When Larry Smith wrote the sesquicentennial history book, he did a number of oral histories with administrators and faculty members and Matt, last year, digitized all of those cassettes that we still had of Larry's and now they're in Digital Commons- all of those interviews. As we went through them, we realized that was done in the nineties and there's a lot history that's taken place. [Alexis describes how she spoke with retired faculty and wanted to continue that practice].

