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## Jeffery Duncan, February 19, 2019

Matt Jones  
*Eastern Michigan University*

Rachel Burns  
*Eastern Michigan University*

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MJ: It is Tuesday, February 19, 2019, I'm Historic Preservation graduate student Matt Jones along with fellow Historic Preservation grad student Rachel Burns and today we are talking to Dr. Jeffery Duncan, professor of English Language and Literature at EMU since 1972?

JD: '71.

MJ: 1971. Ok. 1971 until his retirement from the university in 2012 when he received emeritus Status. Duncan was awarded the Ron Collins distinguished faculty award in 2002 and received other recognitions that we will get into in the interview. I know that you were born in Oklahoma. But I don't know anything else about your family or- I did read some of your memoir, and so we are going to get to that too. But who were your parents? What did they do?

JD: My father was Robert Duncan- he worked at Humble Oil. He was sort of an economist- I never understood it; we were kids- you don't know what your parents do. My daughter asked when she was about 7, "what do you do?" I said "I teach English." She said "Don't your students know English?" So, he did that, and my mom... they divorced when I was 6; I had a younger brother and my mom waited until he was in school, and then she went to work as an executive secretary- that's what they called them then. Then she lived in California where when ended up a VP in a small corporation. She was a go-getter. My dad self-destructed. He wound up burning the candle at both ends. Diabetes, TB, just wore himself out. He didn't have much to do with my raising. When he moved back to Tulsa after a couple stints in a sanatorium, when I was in high school, I would go over to his house every two weeks or so. He gave me beer. We listened to jazz. He had a record collection. We'd argue politics. It was ok. He didn't have too much to do with raising me- that was my mother. My mother was very professional, really smart.

MJ: Do you think that situation with your dad leaving had to do with a lot of the things you wrote about in *Low Crimes and Misdemeanors: Confessions of a Tulsa Boy*?" I want to talk to you about that rabble-rousing behavior when you were a kid. I want to ask if that carried over into teaching, but also, how long did it last? Did you get any of those things from your parents?

JD: I can't answer that. I was told once that when I was young I was really angry. I must have been I guess, but I didn't feel like that. I liked to raise hell. I was young. I've always chafed at rules and regulations- Tyler's the same way. Tyler's my son. "You have to do it this way," "This is the way you're supposed to play along." We'll see about that. Maybe I was. I know that I missed having a father at times. I also was blessed to have a surrogate father. There was a family that looked after my brother and me when Mom was at work. He was...it's hard to say...I idolized him. He was one of the greatest people I've ever met in my life. Owned a garage- no big deal. But, he was generous, super generous, fun, funny, actually kind of charismatic in his way. He had every single woman in Tulsa coming in because they all adored him. He was just a great man. Great man. So, I had

him and he was one of my role models. That didn't account for my juvenile delinquency, but still in the long term, he had a huge influence on my life. So, I was fortunate in that way.

MJ: What steered you towards literature when you were young?

JD: I always read. I got up earlier than anyone else. You wouldn't turn on the radio at 5:30 a.m., so I read. I loved reading. When I was 7 or 8 my mom took me to the library downtown. I got a card. I would go down there on the bus every week or two. Get a stash of books. I was always a reader, loved stories. Loved stories.

MJ: Were you always a teacher?

JD: When I went into college...my family is a business family and Tulsa is a business town. "Bidness," as they say. I didn't know what else I could do. I couldn't do math. I couldn't do science and all that. So, I thought I'd major in business. I took an economics course and a survey of English Lit course my first semester at Santa Monica City College. I liked the economics course. Learned a lot. But, I loved the English course. And, I came out of this Oklahoma background- the teacher was this cool guy. He showed me that you didn't have to be a pansy if you liked poetry, which is probably an odd way to put it. I thought "Man- this guy gets paid to read this stuff? And then get up and talk about it?" So, I decided then to become a teacher. For about three minutes, I thought about teaching high school. But I thought "Nah- I'd have to deal with people like me."

MJ: I read that you didn't want to work with the trouble makers.

JD: Nah I didn't want to do that. Keep in mind, at that time, if you wanted to be a college teacher, you just did it. Jobs were everywhere. This was 1957-58.

MJ: How old were you when you figured out that someone did that for a living?

JD: When I was a freshman in college.

MJ: Is that when you were at Long Beach?

JD: I went to Santa Monica City College for a year-- I couldn't get in anywhere else. I was in the bottom 20% of my class. I barely graduated from high school. But then I made real good grades and transferred to Long Beach State for my last three years.

MJ: Did research attract you at all?

JD: Yeah. I loved it. The best part of the class for me was the term paper. I liked to do the research, I liked writing.

MJ: You started way ahead of time?

JD: Oh yeah- I never turned in a paper late, ever

MJ: Do you remember your first research project?

JD: In college? Yeah. Freshman Comp. We had to do a paper and I did it on Flamenco. There used to be, on the Ed Sullivan TV show, this Flamenco dancer, Jose... I forget his last name. I loved that stuff. So, I got into it and I remember realizing it was the Black music of Spain. It was the Gypsies. They had the same status in Spain as Blacks do here. That roots music. It's theirs.

MJ: Did you learn to dance?

JD: Not that. God no. Oh man. I loved writing a paper.

MJ: So, the Flamenco-- how much research did you do into that?

J: I read everything I could find on it, which wasn't that much back then. I read everything I could. Articles, books.

MJ: How did you wind up at University of Virginia?

JD: I applied to a number of grad schools and Virginia offered me the best deal. I got a three-year fellowship.

MJ: Had your performance improved in college?

JD: Between high school and college I did a 180. A complete 180.

MJ: Why?

JD: It was time to get to work. I had to prove to teachers... they were always telling me I was smart. I didn't know if I could do it because I had never tried in high school. I had a couple challenging classes, but even then, I thought a B would be great. In the west, back then, I don't know about now, it wasn't hard to get in to a state university. You needed maybe a C, C+ average, four years of English, two of history, two of science. You could get in very easily. But, get this one difference in culture: recruiters from Oklahoma University and Oklahoma State University came to my high school and they both said this, this was their pitch: It's easy to get in. Do you have what it takes to stay in? We flunk 40% of our freshman." That was their pitch! Are you up to the challenge? No one said shit about retention, I'll tell you right now. They bragged about it. Hastings Law School in San Francisco--easy to get in, but flunk 2/3 of their freshmen. Different culture

then. I knew I was going to go to college, I didn't have to bust myself. I took the easiest courses I could find. I partied. It's different

MJ: It is different. One reason it is so different is that I have taken your class. It is not the class you might have taken when you were in college. I can't imagine you have ever been accused of being an easy teacher.

JD: No.

MJ: But they were such great classes.

JD: I knew a lot of older guys, three-four years older. They were telling me about how college was so different from high school. I was looking forward to it. I loved it. I was on my own. I was on my own. I hated being in junior high and senior high for all those hours and nothing to do half the time. College is up to you. All up to you. I liked the anonymity. The indifference in a way was liberating. "You want to do this? Do it!" I may have said this to you in your class: K-12, your primary relationship as a teacher is with the student; in college, it's with the material. I'll see you one semester, maybe two, two three times a week. In high school, you see your students every day, every day, every day. It's very different. I loved college.

MJ: We just did an interview with someone a few days ago who said his main principle of teaching was "this is my thumb. Students live under it."

JD: (Laughter)

MJ: That was his philosophy. But, how did you support yourself in grad school?

JD: With a fellowship. They paid my tuition and I got a stipend. Enough to live on. That was a three-year, and then I got another fellowship for the fourth year and was able to finish because I went full time, didn't teach, didn't have any of that. No grad assistant. You could do it in four years if you really humped. Year round.

MJ: Take us from University of Virginia to EMU. I know you were in Leeds?

JD: I went to Washington University in St. Louis out of grad school. Very good school. First semester there was a guy on the faculty named Stanley Elkin. He was a fiction writer. He gave a reading from a novel in progress. Just blew me away. I was just stunned. It was so funny and dramatic, and I said "God-- that's what I want to do." So I started working on fiction instead of scholarships. I did publish an essay, a paper I wrote in grad school, but that wasn't enough to get tenure, but I didn't care: there were jobs everywhere. So I busted myself working on that-- fiction writing. Then I got this deal at Leeds University in England. A new guy on the faculty at Wash. U. nominated me. They had a program they called "Studies in American Civilization." It was the only such program in England

because they don't think we have civilization. I assured my students over there that we didn't, so let's just get rid of that word, I said-- we don't even believe in it. Let's say "culture" instead. I got my stipend to live on and then they asked me stay another year and I stayed another year. I was asked to stay a third year but I found out I would have all kinds of tax problems. I resigned from Washington U. because I didn't want to go back as a lame duck, so I started looking for a job, but the job market had just dried up while I was in Leeds. The bubble had busted. I applied at over a hundred schools. In grad school, six years before, I applied to a lot of universities for jobs, and at the MLA (Modern Language Association) convention I had 22 interviews. Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Toronto. Yeah. But by the time I was looking for a job out of England, I got two bites. One of them was here. The other was a college in Pennsylvania. In Lancaster. I can't think of it right now. Good school. I came here. I was lucky to have gotten it. We didn't know we were in a bubble. My grad school friends and I just thought it was always this way. We didn't know any different.

MJ: Do you remember who you talked to here? Was there anybody?

JD: Milton Foster was the department head. Marty Kornbluth was his assistant. I interviewed with them in New York at the convention. I flew over and we got along.

MJ: Did you have any affiliation with EMU before you got the job?

JD: Nope. Ypsilanti was not even on the radar. I will say, and here's how crazy the market was: out of graduate school, I was offered a job at U of M that I turned down. They could not believe I turned them down. They kept calling me up. I went to Virginia and there were about 7,000 students. I could very easily meet people from other disciplines and stuff like that. At Washington U, it was about the same size. Not a great big school. That's one of the main reasons I went there. I didn't know anyone there. The size was attractive. And I had gone to this great university in Virginia. You think U of M is arrogant? At Virginia, we called the school "The University." THE University. Mister Jefferson's School. All that stuff. I wasn't all that dazzled but that's how crazy it was.

MJ: How was it different here?

JD: Everything was growing and expanding, and there were these new jobs and then BOOM- it all fizzled out.

MJ: What was Milton Foster like?

JD: Very quiet, laid back guy. Very even-tempered. I thought he ran a good department. He listened. He tried to accommodate everyone as best he could. Very diplomatic. I got along with him fine.

MJ: He was department head for a while right?

JD: A long time yeah. One of the things when I came here that surprised me... at Virginia and at Washington U, the administrators came out of the faculty. Served for a number of years, and then went back into the faculty. Here, we have professional administrators, which I think is regrettable. Then there is more of a likelihood of a divide, conflict. I think it's true. My experience here tells me that. So, you didn't have professional administrators. The ones who really ran the school were the secretaries.

MJ: I know that from being a student. In 1971, it was a tumultuous time for Eastern in those 69-70, 71. Was that noticeable?

JD: I got in on the aftermath of that. It was still... oh yeah, people were still in shock. What happened here though was an example of what I'm talking about. The first year I was here, maybe the second, the administration pink-slipped 100 senior faculty right before Christmas. That's why we got the union. We said, hey, this is bullshit. We took the most academic union we could find. Teamsters wanted us, AFL wanted us. But we took AAUP. That is that divide I'm talking about. As it happened none of them got fired. That was not cool, though. That was tumultuous. I'll also say- ok, the juvenile delinquent in me and all that? After we got the union, and we had a first strike, everyone said "Gosh I hope it doesn't come to this, a strike, etc." But I said (to myself, of course), "Oh God, I hope it does come to this, because I've never been in a strike before. This'll be exciting! And fun!" So irresponsible but there it is.

MJ: You were out there on the picket line?

JD: Oh yeah.

MJ: I know that administration...how do you think they handled it? What were your impressions of their actions? Was that your first time dealing with administration?

JD: The usual prejudices against them. They're not really interested in what's really going on in the classroom that much.

MJ: I've never been able to figure out if faculty even connect at all with administrators.

JD: Sometimes, and some administrators come out of the faculty and stay in touch with them and do their best. But you know, like, the department head belongs to administration, not the department. That's bullshit.

MJ: I never know which way the department goes.

JD: Department heads are in the middle. They have to negotiate that. The structure, I think, breeds division. We called administrators "The Suits," which is silly, but there's some merit to it. It seemed to me that they were more interested in the physical facilities, and

I remember this one guy- he was the principal of a high school in Baltimore- he had an idea why college is so expensive. "I haven't been on one campus where there isn't some construction project going on." He was right! Always!

Let's look at accountability. You have to see what you've got. What you can pay for. They should come to the classroom! But we had to fill out forms. How much time do you spend on research, on grading. A colleague of mine would fill it out to the third decimal point. It's all bullshit. They'll take it. It's a make-work. I had an uncle who was in management. University level, city government. He told me years ago: "When you're in management you spend half your time at least covering your ass." That's what translates here- how do you do accountability? You have forms to fill out. It's an ass-covering operation. No one is checking. That's that management mentality. I can't blame them for covering their ass, you know? That's why doctors order unnecessary tests. Covering their ass. The structure demands it. Mandates it. So, I think it's an unfortunate consequence of the structure of this place- having professional administrators.

MJ: Is anyone reading the student evaluations?

JD: Yeah.

MJ: Is that part of that eval structure?

JD: I can tell you a personal story. I came in as an associate. I didn't apply for full professor until I was satisfied with my publishing record. I went back to doing scholarship when I came here. As it turns out, because of the time I'd spent trying to write fiction, my way of writing lit-crit was very different, really different. It wasn't academic. It was prose that was kind of poetic. In fact, I got a creative writing fellowship from the NEA for my literary criticism. I didn't think I deserved full professor until I published some more stuff. I got a book and some articles. Then I applied, and I got turned down.

So, I went to see the Dean about it. I don't remember his name. He was a professional administrator. I didn't have much respect for him. But he said "Well, the student evaluations made a big difference." Ok, fine. Then I said, "Next year, I'm off because I get my research leave time. So there won't be any student evaluations then. Then the next year, I'll apply but I won't have any student evaluations then either. Are you saying I should wait two years before applying?" He said "No, I don't think that's really necessary."

So, we talked some more and as it turned out, everyone within the department was rated equal. They didn't prioritize, and I had the best publishing record. So, they couldn't promote everybody, they didn't think, and I could see that. But, ok, what kind of handle can we use? We have to have some reason. My student evaluations tended to be super high, or super low. I remember the first set I got- one student said, "Fire the



motherfucker!" (laughter) So, you know, I wasn't everyone's cup of tea. Once again, structure can often mandate behavior. It really can. So yeah they read student evaluations. But then they didn't. They went back and forth. Who is going to sit down and read all of those? Who's going to do that?

MJ: I talked to another professor who said he has them all still. Thirty year's worth, and he still reads them sometimes.

JD: Wow. To each his own, man.

MJ: Where were your offices when you first go there?

JD: Pray-Harrold. 6<sup>th</sup> floor. I moved around but that is where I was back then. They were rehabilitating Pray-Harrold.

MJ: You talked about construction projects. Was there one you can remember that particularly irked you?

JD: The student union irked me but I was wrong. It turned out really good. It's really a vibrant place. I take it back. I just felt the other one had more historic value and all that stuff. But, this one turned out to be really good. The campus had shifted down and it made more sense that way. Kirkpatrick I think was the president, and I owe him an apology.

MJ: With the house?

JD: Well, that too (laughter). He was right about the student union. Well, this practice football thing and the enlargement of the stadium- come on. Come on. Even if we get into a bowl game, you know, we are spending an enormous amount of money on this program. It's a huge drain. I like sports.

MJ: Do you like EMU sports?

JD: I've watched some, but I've become really artsy fartsy in my old age. I don't watch sports anymore, not as much as I used to. But I still like it when I do, but there's a lot of books I want to read, man! I have writing to do.

MJ: So, did you have a lot of pressure from your department to do research To publish?

JD: No. Not enough. I didn't need it. I felt there should be more. One of my introductory lectures to freshmen was, "What's the difference between college and K-12?" In K-12, your teacher is in there all day long every day. Here, I'm in the classroom, maybe 9 hours a week. Some people had 12 hours a week. You might have 6 hours a week. Why is that? Of course they didn't know, because I didn't know when I was their age. So I

would explain it: when you are K-12, you are taking chemistry class, getting chemistry teachers. A history teacher. A physics teacher. In college, you're getting an historian, a chemist, a physicist. Were doing it. You have to have time to do it so we spend less time in the classroom because the job as I understand it, half of it's teaching and half of it is research and writing. So, that was always my guide. But, I saw people get promoted who I thought shouldn't be promoted. I didn't have any pressure, but I didn't need it.

MJ: You're still publishing.

JD: I'm mainly writing plays that get produced--a kind of publishing.

MJ: I've seen a lot of ads for plays you've written. I assume you were doing all that when you were still teaching. How do you balance all these things?

JD: How the hell did I write all those articles and plays? I don't know. Because I paid attention to my family. There's something I want to say about Eastern that's super positive. It's sort of the flip side of what we were just talking about, in a way. When I came, I was not happy to be here. After I was here for a while, I really was unhappy to be here. This was not where I wanted to wind up. Then, a job opened up at the University of Iowa and a buddy of mine was there and said it was tailor-made for me. It was. I fit it perfectly. So, I went through the hoops and then they wanted to see some of my recent writing. I sent it. I hadn't gotten the NEA award yet but I knew it was good. I also knew it was different. They did not invite me out to campus. I really wanted that job. That was the kind of school I wanted to be at. And then I waited and waited, and didn't hear from them. Finally I called the head of the search committee and said, "What the fuck is going on?" He said, "Well, I don't think we can invite you. Turns out, half the committee really liked your writing, half didn't--it wasn't the way it was supposed to be." So, I didn't get the job. I was crushed. Then, I've told this story a number of times, but one day, one morning, I walked into the damn bathroom at Pray Harrold and it just came up: could you teach any better there? Would you write any better there? Maybe you belong here. So, I was at peace. It changed my whole attitude. A moment of revelation. Not only that, then when I got tired of lit crit, and I started getting into theater, and I got really wrapped up in the Wild Swan Theater and writing children's plays, the school was absolutely gung ho. I don't think Iowa would have given it the same weight, or approval. Or U of M or schools like that. I think children's theater is an incredible thing--look at how Hollywood spends so much on their children's work... they take it very seriously. Here I've got as much encouragement and the whole thing, so, when people would come here, and we were interviewing them for jobs, I would say, "Anything you want to try, you can do it. The school is not going to push you to do this or do that; if you find yourself going off on some tangent, you can follow it." That's the great thing and why this is best place in the world for me. I also said, "The other thing is, people talk about diversity; if you really want diversity in your student body, you couldn't do better than right here. We've got it." Those are things that were just extra wonderful for me. Absolutely wonderful. I'm just so grateful that I was here.

MJ: When you came here, did you bring your courses with you? I had you for a Melville class in 2002. I told you in our emails that I still talk about that class with other people who love Melville. When faculty retires, do their classes go with them? I don't like to think that class is not still here.

JD: I don't know. I think some do, some stay.

MJ: Did you develop that course?

JD: Yes- I did Whitman and Dickinson. It may have been done before, but that was my... those writers were my thing. The great story of Moby Dick. One of my daughters is a classicist. She called me up some years ago. "OK, I'm going to read Moby Dick." I said "Well don't read it on my account! Do it for yourself! Good luck!" She called me a few days later. "You never said it's funny!" It is funny, I said. "It's really funny! You never told me that!" Well, shit, I'm sorry!. Then I didn't hear from her about that for a couple weeks. I asked her if she had finished Moby Dick. She said, "No, I only let myself read two or three chapters a day because I don't want it to ever end."

MJ: Wow.

JD: You can't say more for a book than that.

MJ: How did you not go straight into professor mode? Give her some lecture.

JD: I wouldn't dare. She's smarter than I am. She knows more than I do. That voice is magical. It's just electric. Ishmael.

MJ: There must have been a lot of students who felt the same that she did.

JD: I think so.

MJ: I know from my own experiences that it was scary to go into that class at first.

JD: It's an intimidating book and yet it's my favorite novel. Not one of my favorite novelists, but that's my favorite novel. It's just, wow.

RB: How many courses did you say you developed during your time here?

JD: No idea. Many, I guess. I think the most significant course I developed was in the honors program when it just started. When Bob Holkeboer was in charge of that. Great story: he had 10,000 bucks. Now it's a college. He was a brilliant administrator. We decided to, together, do a course in writing autobiography. The issue was, it had to be a sophomore level to fit the schedule- could students that young write about themselves?

Usually people are 40 or older when they write autobiography. So we gave it a shot. I required reading- about 6 books that did it in different ways. American. Really different ways- I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, there are a bunch of them, they escape me. A variety. Then, they had to write a lot and it was brilliant. It was just great stuff. They had role models to follow in their writing. They could see ways to write stories about themselves. It really was a great success. I did that year after year after year. I looked forward to reading those papers. It was a very laid back class, we met over in Sill in the lounge and sat on the floor.

MJ: I read where you were talking about one of the things you liked most about teaching was when students work their own experiences into their work. You said that you had times in front of a class that have brought you to tears. Is that because of hearing their stories about their lives?

JD: I'd have students break up into groups. This one woman had really tough childhood stories. The father was an alcoholic. She was an older woman- 40ish. Just burst into tears sobbing. There were a lot of moments when it was very heavy. I taught that course toward the end of my career at the women's prison in Milan. Boy, that was...they didn't have to write about anything in particular. It was a great learning experience for me. They could be honest about themselves and one of the things I found was- they weren't used to getting any respect, had never gotten any respect. I respected them so it turned into something that I had not anticipated. I wanted to hear what they had to say. Another thing that happened toward the end of my career- there was a huge flapdoodle when Jim Harbaugh was still at Stanford and said U of M is just letting guys coast through, you know. Oh! The moral outrage! Even though one psychology professor had 65 independent study students. You have to be fucking kidding me. There was a real flapdoodle about it. Tyler went to school at U of M in Jazz Studies. Ed Sareth was the head of it. Sareth was also a contemplative. He had a contemplative class in jazz studies. Tyler did performance and improvisation and stuff like that. The improvisation course was mainly almost entirely musicians and athletes. Because they have to improvise. Sareth wrote this little pithy essay for the Ann arbor News about how the University encourages and rewards analytical intelligence at the expense of every other kind. Even though it's not the only kind, though it is important. I got to thinking about that. After thinking about these friends of Tyler's who were all in the dance program, I thought, what's the deal here? They're using a different kind of intelligence too. I've always worried about it- I tell classes, "Look- I'm going to ask for analytical papers but literature is not just about solving stuff. It's supposed to move you. I don't know how to get your subjective experience into it. If you read Jane Austen and you don't think she's funny, you're missing it. Even though you might write a brilliant paper, you're missing it." So Ed writes that essay, and I started assigning papers very differently. Undergrad papers. I wanted them to do an imitation and parody of those styles. They may not be able to explain it very well, but they have to get it to write a parody. Like music. Playing by ear. You may not be able to theorize, but you have to GET it in order to do it. That's a different kind of getting it. So, God- it opened up! The papers I started getting were

amazing! I even go so far as to say, "Ok I want you to come up with something in response to this author that is creative in its own way." Students were doing comic books, dances, songs, it was great! Antony and Cleopatra- there is a scene where this messenger comes in. He's got bad news about Antony. She just rips him up one side and down the other. She says, "Bring me some good news!" I said I wanted them to write a paper in Cleopatra's voice, justifying your behavior with this guy. Two or three of them wrote, like, from Cleopatra's perspective, "Who the fuck do you think you are to ask me to justify my actions? Don't you know who I am?!" Yes! Absolutely! They got it! I wish I had done that years and years ago.

MJ: I wish we could have laughed about what we were reading in classes sometimes.

JD: There were classes where the repartee got very intimate. It just happened. Each class has a dynamic. I had one class over in Strong- they were so boring. They were so unbelievably dead! I yelled at them! You are DEAD! I didn't even want to go in there! I couldn't stand it! The very next day, alas, they come in, they were just as dead. I said "I have to hand it to you- you have the integrity of your fucking death because you guys are awful!" You never know.

MJ: I've wondered about how professors deal with that class. Where there is no talking. No one's talking.

JD: I beat my head against the wall. Couldn't fix it. Tried. At least get them pissed off about something!

MJ: As a side note- one of the students I had in the class with me- your class, was Richie Duchamp.

JD: He went into radio.

MJ: I knew Richie before we took the class, and he did NOT talk that much. Then, he took your class and he was the one who talked the whole time, and then he went into radio and talked all day long.

JD: You know, Barb, my wife, is a very wise, smart woman. It used to be that when people complained, she would say, well, you can do this or this or this. But then she realized, people aren't asking for advice- they aren't going to listen. Richie came into the office and we got to talking. He transferred over from U of M, and I asked him what he wanted to do. He says, "What I really want to do? Like really? I want to do radio work. I want to do interviews with people in the field and stuff." I said "That's cool." But he was very embarrassed. I said "Go for it! U of M and EMU are having the fundraiser- they always need volunteers. Go volunteer!" He did! Then he started taking courses. I wrote a letter for him when he got that fellowship at USC. Next thing I knew, he's on the air at WUOM. He did it! Wow! I wonder now and then, what's he doing now? Do you know?

MJ: I haven't heard. I was sorry when he left 91.7-fm.

JD: He didn't have a great radio voice.

MJ: He didn't have an NPR radio voice.

JD: But he could still do radio work. You don't have to be on the air.

MJ: Are there any faculty members that you worked with whom you felt did not receive their due or recognition that they should have gotten? People who worked hard, were creative, innovative, but were always behind the scenes. When I came here to school, I remember hearing names; I was going into English education. Duncan, Sipe, Fleischer ...who else was there? Who was below our visibility?

JD: I don't know what the visibility was. I never read what students were saying about me. I never checked that out. I wouldn't know. I have no idea.

MJ: That's interesting that you don't pay attention. Students pay attention so much just to who is going to be fun, who is going to be hard, etc.

JD: They have a different interest than I do. I just never checked that out. Certain teachers have certain styles that connect with certain kinds of students and not others. If a student wants a lecture that you can outline, I wasn't that guy by a longshot. I would improv too much and that kind of thing. For some, I was too loose. For others it was just right. I modeled my teaching on the teachers that I liked the most. Some teachers everyone adores, others that no one can stand.

MJ: You got a grant in '86- the Faculty Center for Instruction grant, because you used innovative teaching concept in class. Do they tell what that means when you are awarded something like that? What kind of innovative things were you doing in the class? I always wonder if faculty are told. Why were you set apart?

JD: I didn't. I wish I knew. Toward the end of the career, assigning different kinds of papers and stuff, I could tell you that, but that award was long before that happened. One of the things was, students would have a term paper. If you turn it into me by this date, I will get it back to you with a critique and you can redo it. But if you turn it into me after that, I won't have the time to critique it. That's how it works in the publishing world. That is to say, you do rewrites. So I try to give them the chance to do rewrites. Sometimes, early enough, they got to do more than one. They could revise and then improve it. A lot of them took me up on that and did better. I just remembered that. I haven't thought about that in forever. That may have had something to do with it.

MJ: There are instructors that, like you were saying... some classes can be so dead.

JD: That was never a problem. I'd be up and around, up and about, hollering. I would ask students who were slacking off, "Why are you here? Whose money are you wasting? Why are you bothering? I don't force you to be here. This is college- it's your money. What are you doing here? You're not doing anything!" I really couldn't make it today because I didn't allow cell phones, I didn't allow computers.

MJ: Why did you retire?

JD: 46 years Matt! I loved it! It was a great job! But I said, "Lord, let me know when it's time." And the last two years, I just wasn't looking forward that much to going into the classroom. It was time. I loved it, I really did, but I don't miss it. I love getting together with some students, you know, and old colleagues, and other people like with the plays to talk about it and stuff like that. The whole rigamarole of the classroom--I don't miss it. I just focus on what I'm working on, but 46 years! That's long! I loved the job, though.

MJ: So, early on, when you decided to stay when you realized that you wouldn't teach any differently anywhere else...

JD: I wouldn't teach any better. That doesn't make sense.

MJ: That carried over all 46 years?

JD: Absolutely. In part. Let's get personal. I was interested in finding a job elsewhere. It wasn't urgent, but if something came along that was quote unquote better, more attractive, I would take it. But then I got a divorce and my ex moved with the kids to Massachusetts. The jobs ran out here- there was a recession and she got a job in MASS. But with the custody arrangement, I got the kids for every major holiday and all summer. The last thing I wanted to do was move somewhere where they didn't know anybody. They'd come back to stay with me in the summer and they had friends already here. So, that was the end of that. That was cool. I was checking around but it wasn't like before. Just casually looking but not planning anything. The kids came first, though. That was the right thing to do. Through that, I got involved with Wild Swan Theater which is this wonderful children's theater. They do really good stuff and I acted and I wrote plays. I've written 25 plays for them or something They did good work. I did two plays that were done here. I did three actually- one I'm not fond of but two I am.

MJ: You did them here on campus? Did you have to work with the Theater Department at all? Ken Stevens? We interviewed him too.

JD: Yes. He's great. Performance Network and stuff, but here's the thing. People don't realize it until they get into it: Kids are the toughest audience in the world. You cannot say anything about Trump to get a laugh, or any of that kind of crap. They don't give a shit about that stuff. It's just got to be interesting or it's not. It's the story that carries it.

If it's boring, it's just this uproar in the audience. They're not paying attention. They just react- they don't think. We did an old-fashioned commedia dell'arte play--the old street theater stuff--with stock characters and stock situations- the few that I could find that were clean enough. Talk about raunch-- good God almighty, but we had a scene in a restaurant and these two guys don't know each other is there and one is chasing the other. They're back to back in a restaurant. They are passing loaves of bread around and everything, start batting the rolls out into the audience and stuff. We performed it first in Macomb, there was an adult audience. They loved it- it was a fun show. Got down to here for the kids, we threw the rolls out into the audience, and they came right back at us. Hurling them! They react! Disney knows that. The amount of care and attention and talent and money that they spend on their stuff is absolutely staggering. They take it very seriously. (Singing) "Let it go!!!!"

MJ: I only have a couple more questions here for you. They are pretty broad, but, what do you think is your greatest contribution to EMU?

JD: Well, I tried to bring liveliness and intellectual rigor. Both. The classroom was somewhere where epiphanies could happen. Things could pop. You have to leave room for that to happen. I lectured, but I said "Stop me if you don't understand!" Or you just get it going and things can pop for the students, for me, ideas could happen, things could happen. I wanted that kind of a classroom. I often got it. Yet, at the same time, having fun and working hard--that's what I tried to do.

MJ: You said epiphanies could happen in the classroom. Would you tell your students what that epiphany was?

JD; If I had one? Yeah I would.

MJ: But you would let them have their own.

JD: Yes- leave it open. That's what you want. It's not just for getting existing information. For certain courses, that's what it is and what it should be. For me, with what we were dealing with, I wanted awakenings. Awe, you know? If you read good literary criticism, it opens up the text for you. I'm reading a book right now from my classicist daughter. It's this guy who works with PTSD people from Vietnam, a radical. He's reading that in the context of the Iliad. How Homer's describing that stuff, back then PTSD was going on, and each work was informing the other. There's a fairly recent translation that is really good. Wow. It's making me re-read that and then to read what some of these guys went through-- it breaks your heart. It just really- it's so awful. This isn't in the book - this is an example that I know of- this guy, a friend of mine with one of his best buddies- fraternity brothers in college and then he did Vietnam, and he's a great guy, really funny, my friend said. I didn't find him very funny. Really morose and dark. Then, I found out later when he was in Vietnam, once he hit a village, he took a baby up in the coptor and had to toss it off. That shit was going on all the time. I'm reading it, and I'm seeing



the Iliad and I knew why he gets Homer. It's the same damn thing. War is war, and it's hell. It's enlightening to read these things, to make connections. You want to see things anew. Revelations.

MJ: You can see it happen on their faces.

JD: Oh yeah. You can see that what Melville called "the shock of recognition" which is a great phrase. So, that was what I was always shooting for, and I didn't get it all the time, but I did get it.

MJ: After we turn the tape off I want to ask you about something you said in my class 20 years ago, but what do you think is a weakness at EMU? If maybe the weakness that you can think of?

JD: To go back earlier, I thought that the faculty should be held to a higher standard because we are supposed to be doing our research and writing. Sometimes you need a push. I didn't, but some people do. This is what one of the main things- I would say "OK- I don't want to deal with this problem or that" but half my time is in the classroom and half is in research and writing. That's what really drew me into the game. That's what it's supposed to be! I think a lot of faculty are performing and doing the job. I will say this- on my resume, my service part is a little thin. Really thin. As thin as I could get it because I wanted to do the other two things. There's that aspect of academic life that has to be done. In my experience, I remember a guy getting promoted who had no business being promoted just because he's a nice guy. That's not good enough. Is that still the case? I don't know. It's been the case in the past. I think right now, I don't hear good things about what's going on here. I hear it's not good. That's now. But even then, the divide- there's not that much sense of "we're all in this together." There's Them and there's Us. I never liked that. Also, the football program. I like football, but it's a drain, an enormous amount of money.

We're more of a hands-on, rather than a theory-oriented school. I think that is a good thing. A lot of students think so too. This isn't just Eastern- I think the use of adjuncts is immoral. Absolutely immoral. We didn't have that when I first started teaching. They aren't paid enough; it's just all about the damn budget. I think too many administrators are overpaid. Not as badly here as elsewhere.

MJ: I've heard a lot about the feeling that people felt more all-in-it-together in a certain era at EMU- the 70s mostly.

JD: That's partly because that is when we unionized. I was really lucky when I first came in, they didn't have sabbaticals, didn't have faculty research fellowships and stuff like that. The North Central Accreditation Committee did their review, and said, "Hey- If you are offering grad courses, you have to support research." So they did. Added sabbaticals, faculty research fellowships. I got every one I could get. I got a number of them. That

was a great benefit. Then, throughout the years and negotiations, the English Department, if we taught a comp course, the pitch was 'Every time you teach a comp course, it's the same amount of work.' If you teach a lecture course, once you get it the first time then you just refurbish it over and over. So, we should get only three courses if we taught a comp course. All that stuff is now kind of fading. I was here in a very good era for me, speaking personally. But the faculty research and fellowships and stuff- that is away of encouraging research and whatnot. It's very hard to write much if you are teaching four courses. It seems like it wouldn't make that much difference but I did it one year and it was tough.

Now, my former colleagues tell me it is not a happy place. The English Department, of course is weird. They got all these components that shouldn't be there- Public Relations, Journalism, Linguistics, that is nonsense. But, one of the things that we could tell job prospects is that we get along. We have disagreements, we fight, it's settled, and it's done. Daughter Anne, graduated from Penn, first job, Texas. One of the biggest classics departments in the world. First day, some tell her, "Don't want to pay attention to that asshole, he's a motherfucker." The warfare in the department was just horrendous, she said. We didn't have that. We didn't have that. That made it great. That stuff, it just eats away at you, you know? It's hard to work in that environment, in those circumstances.

MJ: What about strengths of EMU?

JD: The diversity. Absolutely. I mean, of every kind- age, level of prep, race, part-time students, I think that's a great, great strength. That's one of them. You should always encourage faculty to do their own thing, which has happened. I don't know about now, but it used to happen when I was there. IF you are doing your own thing, then you have the passion. If you have passion, you are going to do a lot better. We want the university to be a place of life. It's kind of funny- I never thought about this until recently, I lived two blocks from Tulsa University; it was in my backyard. I hung around on that campus. I didn't hang out at the library, but there was a sports field, and so I have always been around universities. I lived for a year in a town without a university--Santa Barbara. The University of Santa Barbara is 25 miles away. It is not a college town. Oh, what a difference it makes. It's the life, and the university should always encourage that. Eastern has it. Students, from everything I've seen, students like it here. Like it a lot. That's good. You want the life.

With the diversity, teaching people literature? The differences between 18 year olds and 35 year olds? It's immense! That's, I think, the main thing. That happened under President John Porter. He was the best president. He was terrific. He had this guy, Tony Evans --got him in as Provost. That was a big brouhaha. Because Porter didn't go through the formal procedures and faculty was like, "You can't do this..." Porter was like, "This one time, I need this guy." Tony had the idea- we're not competing with U of M-- they do their own thing. He just laid out what he thought our thing should be. Diversity. And we

did it. Wow! It made a huge difference! I've had students who just have no business being here. That's alright, they'll wash out. But also, students are just absolutely top of the line. Everything in between. You know, let's try this: it'll hit close to home. I had an Introduction to Lit class, so I'd have a quarter to a third Black students. U of M put on a production called *The River* by Roger Miller, about Huck Finn. Not one time was the word "nigger" used. Huck Finn. In a sense, the novel is about Huck learning that Jim is not a "nigger." That's what he learns! That he is a human being! But if you don't use the word, yeah, I know the word is loaded, but I could come to class and say, "I just saw this play-- hey, white folks I'm not talking to you, I'm only talking to Black folks. This is what happened- they didn't use the N word." My black students said, "What?!?! Are you kidding me?" I could have that conversation at Eastern. I couldn't do that anywhere else. We could really talk here. We could get to it. We were reading a novel by a radical Black writer, Leroi Jones, about race in America, and a Black student, Paul, an older guy-- my God, it's been 20 years!--Paul came up to me and said, "Ok, when are we really going to get to it?" I said, "Next class." He said, "You better." Isn't that cool? I loved that.

MJ: I've heard that you can do things like that at Eastern. Faculty have better relationships with the students or maybe it's just more suited to the students' lifestyles. It seems like it's like, Eastern couldn't do it with any other students.

JD: I've described this one guy who got really upset with me a few years ago when I referred to Eastern as a blue collar school. But I meant it as a term of praise. I went to a school like this--Long Beach State College. Commuter school. And got a good education. And blue collar means to me that we don't have pampered students, or we didn't. I didn't have to say to a student, "Now, I'm going to tell you that there's some stuff in here that might be disturbing. It might offend your feelings or upset you," I didn't have to go through that crap. All the comfort rooms or whatever. The students are not pampered. You find something offensive? Don't read it. The word "emotion" means "to disturb." To move out of something because you've disturbed it. That's what literature does. If you don't find Shakespeare disturbing, you're missing it. So, we didn't have to deal with that, not on the same level as other pampered universities. But even here, I had two students, one went to London and one went to Dublin for apprenticeships after they graduated in theater. They came back and I said, "How was it?" They both said, "They don't have PC!" Well, I can tell you, we lived eight months in Dublin for Tyler, and I got involved in a play--a local play. Big musical, takes a familiar story and turns it into a big production with lots of topical satire and stuff. Over the top. It is over the top. The show I was in was *Treasure Island* and I was the captain. My opening line, and I won't try my Irish accent here, was this Squire pointing at me and saying, "The captain shall select the crew. He knows the kind of men he wants." And I say, "You better believe it, Squire baby-- I do" as this FLAMING gay man. Long John Silver, with a crutch, was called crutchy, gimp, cripp- every name in the book. Because in Ireland, everyone is fair game. Everyone. Even here at Eastern it's not as loose as that, but it is way better than at a lot of places. I never felt constrained in the classroom. I loved talking to the Black student

about Huck Finn. The University should be a place of life- intellectual, and not just intellectual, but also spiritual. A place of inquiry, a place of discovery.

MJ: Do you have anything else Rachel?

RB: I have a question going back to use of adjuncts. When I looked at the English Department faculty listing, there's so many part-time lecturers. It feels like, I don't know about other departments, but why do you think the English Department is set up like that where they utilize so many?

JD: In the English Department, it doesn't have the same clout as, say, the business school or technology. The English Department gets literally short-changed. In fact, when my daughter Anne was on the faculty at Arizona State, they didn't like that she married a guy who was a lawyer- he was practicing in DC, so she took a leave. Then he decided, he got tired of corporate law stuff, so he looked into teaching. He was actually published. Kind of amazing. So, he got a job at Nebraska at the law school. He said, "Well, here's the deal. My wife is a classicist, and she needs a job too." The Dean said he would talk to the President about it. The president was a former law dean. It turned out they had wanted someone in classics for years and couldn't get the job filled. They didn't have any clout. Law schools do. So, my daughter, who had already published a good book with Cambridge Press for God's sake, she rode in on the coattails of her husband who was just beginning an academic career. It's a market thing. So, adjuncts are cheap. It's real simple.

RB: Where do you think the future of the academic humanities are? It seems like we're are in like, everything is stemmed. You have to be advocating for STEM and stuff. That's a fear of mine because that's not my, like, academic training is in. what do you think will become of English Literature and the other humanities, in 20-30 years?

JD: Like everyone, I'm concerned. Writing is easy. You can make a case for writing. We don't have to worry about teaching writing. But the others...I'm praying that action gets a reaction. That they come to realize that the University is not just about producing people who fit into the economy. It's about, and this was the original idea at schools like Eastern and U of M: the land grant university was supposed to produce citizens. People who are able to handle democracy. Able to develop it. One of the strengths of our education system is that in the past, we made an effort to do both, as far as general studies requirements take you. I taught in England, and there you start majoring when you are 15, 16. Your last two years of high school, you're in your major. You just continue it through college. The BA was a three-year degree. My students there have read a whole lot more literature than my students here. They hadn't read Moby Dick, and the chapter called Cytology is this wonderful parody of Linnaeus and his classification system that we learn in high school biology and that's still used--they didn't know who Linnaeus was. They had no idea.

I went to Santa Monica City College. They didn't have an out of state fee. My tuition was \$7.50. When I went to Long Beach State, my tuition was \$42.00. At Cal Riverside my brother's was \$65.00. At University of Oklahoma at that time, it was \$3/credit hour. The states poured money into the schools, so they could afford full-time faculty. Now, they don't support the schools nearly as much as they did because no one wants to pay taxes anymore. NO one went into debt back then. People don't want to pay taxes- there is a reason we have taxes- so we can have roads and schools and fire departments. But now... I think Reagan's greatest disservice was to convince people that the way to raise revenue was to cut taxes. It never worked. Never works. People got that idea fixed in their heads. And it's costing us, big time.

But you two, keep with it. There's a wonderful book that you should read- The Library. It's about a fire in the LA Library. It's what libraries are doing now. There is a lot of work for librarians because libraries are community centers- service centers. Museums are the same thing. People still want museums.

MJ: Well, that's all we have.

JD: That's all I have.

MJ: I'm going to shut it off.

JD: Are you going to stay in touch with me about your gigs?

MJ: Yeah! Absolutely!