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An Interview with
Dr. Jadwiga Maurer

Conducted by
~~??????~~
Judy Batson

Oral History Project
KU Retirees' Club
University of Kansas

JADWIGA MAURER

Ph.D., University of Munich, 1955

Service at the University of Kansas

Associate Professor – 1970-74

Professor – 1974-2001

Q: I am speaking Dr. Jadwiga Maurer, professor of Slovak Languages and Literature, who retired in May of 2001. We are speaking on November 29, 2001, at the Adams Alumni Center on the University of Kansas Campus in Lawrence. Let's begin at the beginning and if you could tell me where you were born and when.

A: I was born in 1930 in Kielce, Poland, which is a medium sized city in Poland, which has grown a lot I understand.

Q: What did your parent's do?

A: My parents were teachers. My father taught at the high school, which of course in Europe, at that time, was much more highly regarded than it is here, teaching high school. My mother was also a high school teacher. She taught Polish literature, but she stopped working, as so many women did, when I was born. She taught maybe three-year or so. They came to Kielce from other parts of Poland and this is where they got their positions.

Q: Where is that city in relation to Warsaw?

A: It is between Warsaw and Krakow, in central Poland.

Q: Were you the first born in the family? Do you have brothers and sisters?

A: Yes, I was the first born and I am the only child.

Q: You said you were born in 1930, which of course brings us to the obvious question of what happened during the war years since Poland was such a battle ground.

A: I am a survivor of the Holocaust and I even if I wanted to tell you, which I think would not be terribly useful, of all the places that I have been during the war, I couldn't. We left Keilce in 1939 on foot. Then we had all kinds of adventures. I was in convent school in the last year of the war. Before that were in Krakow, we were hiding in various places etc., and at some point, I went to convent school. The last year of the war, we spent in Slovakia, which was a little bit different, although it was allies with Germany so the occupation was not quite as stern as in

Poland. Then we returned to Krakow, which was the place from which we left to Slovakia in 1944. I went to school in Slovakia and I went some to school in Poland just before the war and a little bit during the war. After the war, we lived for a year in Gdansk, and then we left for Munich. This was in 1946 in the so-called American zone. There was no Germany then. We were going to immigrate, but with one thing and another, I finished my schooling in Munich and I also graduated from the University of Munich. We were there for about 10 years, which was much longer than my parents intended.

Q: You said you went to school for a time in Slovakia. Did you speak the language?

A: Yes. I learned the language very quickly. Slovak is very similar to Polish. I do not think I could put two words together now. I don't even know if I would understand everything now, but at that time, it was very easy for me. I was reading and speaking in Slovak. Sometime people did not even recognize that I was not a Slovak. I forgot it as quickly as I learned it.

Q: Did your parents find it more difficult to deal with the language than you did as a child did?

A: Yes, I think so. However, as I said, it is close to Polish. Naturally, it is different, but it is not too difficult to learn.

Q: Why were you in hiding? You said you had to hide for a while during the war.

A: Well, because I am Jewish and that is why.

Q: Okay, I did not realize that. The whole family survived?

A: Yes.

Q: That is amazing.

A: Yes, it is amazing.

Q: Looking back on your experiences then, do you find it sort of ironic that you ended up in Germany and going to a German university?

A: No, see everybody kind of hints that at that or asks that. Not at all because there was a big exodus from Eastern Europe and as I said in the beginning, Germany was a place where it was in the American zone of Germany, so there was no Germany. It was divided up in these zones and this was the place to go if you wanted to leave Eastern Europe and go somewhere else. Most people went to the United States, some went to Australia, and some went to Canada. These were the immigration countries and at that time, it was very natural. Now, after all these years, people often ask me, who I felt about it. It is a bit of a misunderstanding. It is an interpretation that they draw from knowing about Germany and knowing about Germany later on. Then when we stayed off, there was a very large community of people who also came from Eastern Europe, so I went to German schools, but it was not quite like what people have in mind when they say about me and Germany.

Q: Since the area you were in was in an American zone, did you have much contact with American's at that time?

A: No much, but I married an American. There was a presence of American. Generally, at that time, and much longer, it was sort of like an American colony in that area. Not in the British zone. I do not know how it was there and the Russians in East Germany later on. The American zone, western parts of Germany, it was sort of like an American colony for many years.

Q: Did you go to that zone deliberately?

A: Oh yes. They were actually inviting people to come. There was at that time, a government, an American General, and I think the _____ commissioner was General Clay and then some other General, McMillamy I think was high commissioner of that area where Munich is. They invited people in, refugees in. Of course you have to think of it as Germany was already full of refugees because of forced labor and people came out of concentration camps and people who fled to the West. There was this push to

get to the West before the Russians crossed the borders. It was not like that was single, I do not know how it breaks down in numbers, but there was an enormous immigration or push to the West.

Q: What did you possess at that time. Did you just have your clothing or did you have some books and things like that from your old life in Poland?

A: No, we did not have anything from the old life, however, we like everybody else, acquired new things. We had an apartment; we had things that we bought. My father worked in various institutions that were refugee institutions and later, he was also a lecturer at the University of _____ . Those were different times and kind of hard to explain, but it was like a new life. We did not bring anything from Poland and I think that is how most refugees lived. There was some help from various organizations in the beginning. People started working and studying.

Q: When you started going to school in Munich, who were your teachers?

A: It was a German school. It was a normal organized German school. Of course, I did not know any German. My parents did, but there again, living in the country, even though we did not have much traffic with the German's, I learned. In the beginning, I had private lessons to help me out. When you live in a country, you learn it differently. I learned rather quickly.

Q: You must have a _____ for languages to a certain degree. When you went to, what I would call high school, did you have it in mind that you were planning to go on to a university at that time?

A: Oh yes. My parents raised me with the idea that I would be going to the university. That was a given sort of thing.

Q: What were you interested in studying at that point? Did you have certain subjects that you liked better than others?

A: Yes, I studied English literature, Slovak language and literature's, which was a different department, and history. You had to have one main field and two other fields, minor's so to speak. I say so to speak because you go through dissertation if you going for Ph.D. in your major field, but in your minor fields, you were examined almost the same way as the major. The system was a little different and the German system evolved in the meantime too, is different. Now, I could not tell you exactly how they do it.

Q: You chose the University of Munich because it was there?

A: Yes, because I lived there.

Q: Did you live at home and go to school?

A: I always lived at home. Actually, I was thinking about this the other day, that unlike other people, and most of my colleagues, I have never lived alone. I always lived with my parents, and then I got married and lived with my husband and my family.

Q: Do you recall any particular teacher's at the university that were inspiring to you.

A: Yes, actually all of my professors were inspiring and they were all famous people in their fields.

Q: Mostly men?

A: Three of them were men. I do not thing there were more than two or three women at that time, who were professors at the University of Munich. One was, I remember, was in medicinal chemistry, and one associate professor was in history. I would say maybe there were two others, but that was it. There were women lecturers on the lower levels, but on the higher levels, faculty was all males. This was not, of course, on the books anywhere, but that is how it was.

Q: I sort of interrupted you in terms of asking you about the people who inspired you. I would like to go back to that. Could you tell me a little bit about those people?

A: Well, when you say inspired, maybe we are not thinking exactly the same thing. I mean they were people who were very famous in their fields and who were very good lecturers and inspired that way for scholarships, for studying, for research. I would not say that they inspired me at a personal level. In Europe, I think in my parents time and before the war, during the whole 20th century, I think that was a concept that was fairly important to the European universities because there were large number of students and, of course, you could get acquainted and I did with some of my professors. They did not take much interest in the student's affairs and conversely students lived in a different world. The way we have it now, there are much more relationships with professors. I do not know how it is now in Europe. I think that the huge crowds of students in Germany still are not conducive to one on one anything.

Q: That certainly was true when I was in college in the 1960's. I did not know my professor's. I would never think of calling them by their first name or anything like that. I did not ever call them on the telephone. I understand what you are talking about. While you were going through college, when did you decide, or how did you come to the decision that you were going on for graduate work?

A: In Germany, there is no college or you can say there is graduate work. You go through the university. You start in let's say in four year's you finish your courses, for your Ph.D. you have to take let's say in each field, two seminar's and this and that and the other thing, sort of like we have here so they had requirements. Those requirements at that time, it did not mean that everybody who took the seminars was going to get a Ph.D. On the

other hand, if you wanted your Ph.D. you had to go take these classes. I decided to finish, and I never thought of dropping out. Because in my mind, I was not going to stay in Germany, or because I was not going to work for the state and be a teacher, I might have become a lecturer. I had an offer to become a lecturer in Polish from the University of Munich. Because I thought I might go somewhere else, it was very vague, but the immigration was always moving somewhere and I decided to get a Ph.D. because that was more universal than getting the Boards, which amounts to a state exam, which is almost the same in terms of requirements, but would only qualify you only to teach in German schools and whatever. You might be able to get a job on a newspaper or something, but I thought a Ph.D. was a Ph.D. and if you wanted to get the State Boards, you did not have to write the dissertation etc. I thought the scholarship was more interesting.

Q: What did you write your dissertation on?

A: It has been published in a book. The reason I was sort of sighing is that, for many people it is very esoteric. I wrote it on the _____Perfect Ten's in Polish and I am not going to go into a long explanation. The _____Perfect Ten's in Polish does not officially exist. It is a little complicated.

Q: I can understand why you sighed! I won't ask any more questions about your dissertation!

A: No go ahead, but I am warning you this may not be the most interesting subject. Let's say grammatical English _____, so later I switched to literature. I thought Linguistics was interesting to me and I was good at it.

Q: So you were interested in it as an academic study, but it is not what you wanted to do with your life or how you wanted your career to develop?

A: No even in academic study, I was more interested in Literature, but the main professor in Slovak languages and

literature, as I said a famous person in his field, Professor _____ was a linguist and so while he would have accepted the literary topic for a dissertation, I do not think he would have been that happy. I decided this was interesting enough and I passed exams and the dissertation together, *suma cum louda*, which was almost an unprecedented feat in Germany, so apparently I chose well.

Q: I would say so! When did you get your degree, what year?

A: 1955.

Q: Were your parents alive through all of this and I assume very proud of what you had accomplished?

A: Yes, they were very pleased that I had finished and that I did so well. I, however, later on, decided that, I still taught Linguistics at Berkley when I came, but I decided that literature was more interesting to me later on.

Q: So you get your degree and then what happens. What do you decide to do?

A: I did not really decide anything. I had some offers for jobs, but that is somewhat beside the point. I met my future husband. He was an exchange student. He was, at that time, at the University of Chicago finishing his masters. Then he was drafted into the Army and came back to Germany as a soldier. We got married in the summer of 1956.

Q: In Germany?

A: Yes. I did not think I would live much longer in Germany. That was the turn of events really. Here I was, a person who was basically was almost a child, came to Germany to immigrate, but I did not. Now, I was on my way to the United States anyway.

Q: Did you know English at this point?

A: Yes, English was one of my minors, and I would not say that when I came here in 1956, that I could have talked to you like I do now, but almost. I knew English; I could read books and everything.

Q: You were comfortable in English.

A: Yes.

Q: When did you and your husband come back to the states?

A: We came in the fall of 1956.

Q: Where?

A: At that time, his parents lived in Lancaster Pennsylvania. He is from Pennsylvania. We stayed there for a little while, then we went back to Germany and lived with my parents and he worked for Radio Free Europe. He was a letter class mailman for them in the mailroom and he tells me there were a lot of things people started in the mailroom. Then we came back and he decided to continue his studies and also go for his Ph.D. By that time, we had a son, and we decided on Berkley because there were three Slovak departments at that time. They really counted in the United States. There was Harvard, Berkley, and Columbia. The two Ivy League schools were very expensive, of course, and we did not have any money, so we thought Berkley might be a the place where were might get something. He had a GI bill and he had a TA ship, but after a year at Berkley, I got an offer and I had a wonderful job. In fact, I was an assistant professor and I was promised tenure at Berkley. When I look back the way women live now, I do not think any woman would have left that job to follow her husband, but I did because that is what people did in those days. I taught Polish literature and some linguistics.

Q: So you taught Polish literature and linguistics at Berkley as an assistant professor?

A: Yes. As a lecturer first, then as an assistant professor. I was promised tenure, but when he finished, it was very strict. I do not know if they would have employed my husband or not, but it was very strict and they do not employ their own students. It was an idea that maybe if he went away for two years and came back, sounded awfully complicated and there were plenty of jobs at that time.

Q: What year was this when he finished.

A: We moved to Indiana in 1965, but he was through writing his dissertation, but we had two jobs, two positions in two departments at Indiana.

Q: So you left Berkley also with the intention of getting another academic job?

A: Oh yes, I had already looked for it when we decided to move. At that time, it was very easy because the Slovak departments were being built up by the government and expanding. Coming from Berkley, there were only three departments in the whole country that counted. We had offers from other places like Illinois, we had an offer from Yale, but it was sort of tentative for me, so we decided not to take that chance.

Q: What was it like moving from Berkley to Bloomington?

A: It was like moving to a foreign country. It was totally different. Even now, some friends from Bloomington, who were once my students, they say that they remember that I said one day, "Oh I know how the British felt in India." It was town and gown. It was totally separate. It was not bad, it was just different. Kind of colonial.

Q: Did you ever see that movie about the bicyclist? Did that bring back memories when you saw that?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes, that was definitely a town in gown kind of thing in that movie I remember.

A: That is very true. I do not know how it is now exactly, but I suspect not much different.

Q: So you were hired as an associate professor?

A: I was an associate professor of Slovak languages and literature at Indiana University in Bloomington.

Q: Your husband was in the German department.

A: Yes. He was an assistant professor and this was a huge department and they had like 14 assistant professors or something. He was not terribly happy there and we had two children by then, a son and a daughter, and he went to the

MLA convention, not with the idea of looking for a job, but he got an offer from Kansas because some people that we knew at Berkley were in the German department at KU. Then we moved here and that was in 1968.

Q: Again, did you come with the idea, or did you already have contacts set up to have a job here?

A: I did not. It was not a package deal. The reason was there may have been more reasons that we did not negotiate anything, but the main reason was that I had started writing and publishing in Polish immigrant papers and I started writing essays and fiction. I thought I would take a year or two off and write. When I started working again in 1970, I got a very prestigious award for a book collection of short stories and so I took a job when they offered it to me. Looking back, I would not recommend it to people now because now there are so few jobs and the market is so tight that it is a great risk to do that. Shortly afterwards, there was not that many jobs all of a sudden.

Q: So you hit a lucky time really.

A: Yes and the academic market is always up and down as you well know. It is very hard to figure out. Now our daughter will be up for tenure next year.

Q: Where is she?

A: She is in Illinois. At the University of Illinois.

Q: When you said you wanted to write and wrote some short stories that won an award, was this all in Polish?

A: Yes.

Q: Why were you writing in Polish?

A: I really do not know. I always expressed myself in fiction in that language and now I am all of a sudden a well-known writer. In Poland, people write to me. I wrote two volumes of short stories and a lot of them scattered in papers or periodicals and when the Communist regime was overthrown, I had possibilities in Poland, but of course, this is my home. I would never move. I cannot tell you

why. I am a person who believes very much in expression in a certain language in a median and to me for more literal things of fiction and essays, Polish is the language in which I think. I express myself the best. However, I have published in English in scholarly papers and the thing is that once you separate like that, it is very hard to do anything else.

Q: So Poland is the language of the imagination and the English is the language of scholarship?

A: You put it better than I could.

Q: Well, I do not know about that, I was just trying to understand! Did you bring your children up to be bilingual?

A: No, they have not shown any interest. Maybe vaguely to please me sometimes and I tell you another thing. It is not easy to do that when both parents speak some other language. My husband still does not know maybe three words of Polish and only then if he recognizes them. Nobody showed any strong interest. Also they are in professions that they do not need it. Steve is a lawyer and free lance journalist and Elizabeth is an economist. Those are not exactly the fields where people want to learn more languages.

Q: So you took a couple of years off and devoted yourself more to fiction. Then what happened to bring you back into academics?

A: There were some people who I did not know in the History department and Political Science who knew about me and they went to the Slovak department and asked them you they did not make me an offer. I did not even know about it. Then they made me an offer, but it was not an offer that I really wanted. I do not remember exactly how it was, but after half a year or so, they made me another offer, and I became a visiting associate professor.

Q: What year was that?

A: 1970. Visiting was only to keep me out of the regular, but I think they only kept me on that a year.

Q: Then let's say after a year, you became what?

A: Associate professor of Slovak Languages.

Q: At that point, when you became an associate, were you given tenure automatically or did you have to go through the hoops that most people have to go through?

A: No I was not given tenure automatically, but I do not think it was terribly nerve wracking or involved.

Q: When did you become a full professor?

A: Maybe like in 1973 or 1974 and I was also, at that time, acting chair of that department.

Q: How big was the department at that time?

A: Well, it was fairly big for being a relatively new department. It only had three full professors', four with me, which is about what it has now. They had two associate professors and a couple of assistants. For a Slovak department in the Midwest, it was fairly big.

Q: When did the department come into being at KU, do you know?

A: No, I do not know exactly, but probably in the early 60's.

Q: Was there a renewed interest or renewed push for Slovak languages as a result of Sputnik and those kinds of things?

A: Yes. There was, at that time, Slovak departments were doing very well because there was some support from the government for quite a long time after Sputnik. They hired, you know maybe not a lot of people, but they hired and there were quite a few _____ students.

Q: Here at KU?

A: Yes. There is nothing between here and CA that offers's Ph.D's.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. All the states around us do not have a Ph.D. program in Slovak like Nebraska, Iowa, Oklahoma, Colorado; they do not have any.

Q: Is that because any one person or a couple of people who pushed for graduate work at the department here?

A: I think it was a combination of things. There were a few people who pushed for Slovak studies in general and supported the department. One of them was Professor **Vacouse**, the late Professor **Vacouse**. He has been dead for many years. I think there was a lot offered to KU for the Slovak program from Washington and they hired Professor Conrad, who was at that time in Texas and who had been a student here. He is a native of Kansas City. They built it up that way. There was money and there was also money for exchange programs, which were funded by the government, but ran out at KU _____.

Q: So you felt like the administration was supportive of Slovak languages at that time?

A: I think so and I think it was supported because that was the thing to do. If you are being offered money, you do not turn it down. It went very well through the 70's and part of the 80's. We also have this institute _____ in Slovak and East European studies and the lector, Maria Carlson, was very good at running that thing and we still get support from Washington from the Department of Education. This is a little bit different, this is the age of _____.

Q: This is a little bit off the subject of your own career, but just for my own interest, if a Slovak languages department is writing grants, who would they be writing the grants to? Who would be the most likely people to give them money?

A: The government still gives grants and there are foundations. All the well-known foundations and then there are special branches of foundations that have to do with Eastern Europe and you would be putting in for those grants if they are available from them. There are not a great deal maybe not as many institutions as in Science, but there are foundations that give grants.

Q: Enough that you can usually count on somebody that you can write to and maybe get some money.

A: This has become very fashionable or the thing to do so a lot of people apply for grants.

Q: Let's go back to a little bit earlier time. When you came to Lawrence, did you have the same feeling that you had when you went to Bloomington, or did you feel like maybe you were going to like it here? How did you feel about Lawrence when you first came?

A: First of all the big change was California to anything else and from Berkley to Bloomington. Because I already lived in Bloomington, I did not find Lawrence outlandish or anything. I think life here was good and I thought it was going to be good. We settled in much better than we had in Bloomington. I do not regret leaving Bloomington at all, but one of the things that I think was wrong with Bloomington was that we lived in university housing and it was not permanent. You could feel that it was not permanent. There was not any shock.

Q: How old were your children when you came to Lawrence?

A: Well, Steve was born in 1958 and we came to Lawrence in 1968. Elizabeth was born in 1964, so she was little.

Q: I have heard a lot of people talk, I do not have children myself, but I have heard a lot of people say that when they came to Lawrence, they sort of had a feeling this was going to be a good place to bring up children. Did you have the same kind of feelings?

A: Yes, it was sophisticated enough, but small enough, and did not seem to have any problems with crime. You know all those things you would have if you went to the big city. Also, it did not have the problem of public versus private schools. It had good public schools and there was no problem of that type, which you had in many other places.

Q: When you first came to KU, how many women were in the university at that time? Did you feel like you were in a minority as a woman professor?

A: Yes, oh yes. There were very few. I think the statistics are right when they say there are about between 9 and 12% are professors, associate professors maybe 30%, then assistant professors almost 50%. It was not like that at all at that time. The upper levels have changed very little and nobody knows why that is. Obviously, women drop out. It was not like that at that time, because even at the assistant professor level, there were not very many women. I was the first woman in my department and the only woman for a long time.

Q: Was that difficult?

A: No, it was not difficult because I was use to it. There were two women at Berkley. There were other women at Berkley, but they were not on the regular tenure track. They were lecturers. This was not tenure tract and this was not going anywhere.

Q: Did the women who were on the faculty, at that time, did they try to get together and offer support to each other or be any kind of a voice in the University?

A: That came later.

Q: How much later would you say?

A: Oh, ten years later and I do not think much came of it. The women were trying to organize at a certain time and I cannot tell what year that was exactly, but there was even an association that even negotiated with the administration. That must have been in the late 70's. There were meetings etc., but as the big push was made, women elsewhere were protesting etc., all of the local associations fell apart. These women joined these national organizations. I have never seen that much organizing here on campus. There were certain women who were trying to organize groups. This is insignificant, but to me this was so strange, when they told me when I got the job, I had to remain as a dependent on my husband's health insurance. I could not understand why and they explained to me that it was the same thing. It is not the same thing! Later, they did change that, so yes, there

was some pressure, but the pressure came from somewhere else, from above.

Q: What about salary's, were you paid less?

A: Yes, my salary, until the very end suffered from that. I think it suffered from two circumstances. One, that women were generally offered less simply on the theory that they are going to accept it because what are they going to do. Also, that I was married. They kind of looked at the family income. They did not say this, but you knew it. Women's salaries were lower and you did not need any study to see that. They were just lower across the board.

Q: How difficult was it to raise a family and be a full time professor? Was that something that you were use to?

A: Yes, I think that it is difficult and a lot of it is in the attitude of how you start. That is why I do not believe in waiting until your children are bigger or wait for this or that. I do not think that is a good idea. We set out to have these two careers, so that both of us work. I was never the full time housewife and my husband was never a full time househusband. We shared a lot of things. I cannot compare. It is difficult. My daughter is in that situation now.

Q: When you first entered the department here, were most of your students male and did that change over time?

A: I do not, there were a lot of women in graduate school in languages, but a lot of them never finished. Most of the people who finished were men, but there were some women who finished and there women around as graduate students. I cannot tell you what proportions.

Q: What sorts of things did you teach in those early days when you first entered the department?

A: I always taught the Polish language on the advanced level and we always had a TA for first year and they still do, and Polish literature, comparative Slovak literature's and as I said in the very beginning, I taught Linguistics. Then later I also taught Slovak women writer's when this became

fashionable that each department had something in women's studies.

Q: Was this of interest to you anyway?

A: Yes. We do not have that course anymore, over the years, I taught a lot of different courses. It was also up and down with the Slovak studies. There were some years where you simply had to teach language. There were always students for language and maybe one course in Literature. We also had individual study, and that is very important in smaller fields because if someone wants to go and do a Ph.D. in Polish, we do not have enough courses for that person, so they have to take individual studies. We had a course called Topics where you can accommodate such people. That is dedicated for something that they need.

Q: Do you think you liked being in a department where there was a graduate program as opposed to not?

A: Yes. We have very few graduate students now and I still think that our department was always, as long as I can remember, get the graduate studies. I think also that the money that still come in like the government are for graduate studies. Very little is done for undergraduates. I guess with the idea that they have to go through college somehow.

Q: Do most of the people who go into graduate work in Slovak languages let say in Polish literature, would they already have a fairly good command of the language? Would that be an absolute necessity?

A: No. In fact, there are some places where you have to, what now is fashionably called heritage students like Chicago, Detroit, where these people are Polish descent and maybe bring from home some knowledge, various degrees, but the places I have been in always had a cross-type of American students. Somebody asked me to write an article, this person is in England, on ethnic origin of my students and I turned it down. First of all, it is not that interesting, and secondly, I am not that interested in the whole thing. I think that this is a mistaken idea often when people look at

American universities and they here of Polish course, and that probably goes for other languages, they assume that these are people from the Polish community. Nothing could be further from the truth. These are various people who for various reasons study. There is a small percentage at times of people who marry into the Polish community, but this is usually short lived. They take a couple of courses and that is it. Most serious graduate students, something happened that they started Slovak languages. Most of them started Russian because Russian is everywhere. Then they switched or they took it as a minor or something. Lately, there has been a group of people who were in Poland teaching English and they got interested in study Polish when they came back.

Q: Have you done any translating?

A: No.

Q: Does that interest you at all?

A: Not particularly no. I appreciate if somebody is a good translator. It is very difficult and grateful job, but no, I have not done any myself.

Q: You said that when you first entered the department, or shortly thereafter, you became acting chair or co-chair?

A: I was acting chair. That was when our chair went for a year to Russia. They voted on it and see I was the only woman at that time, but they voted me in.

Q: Did you like that role? Did you like administration?

A: Yes. For that time, that role was very good.

Administration has changed so much now; I would not want it now. The chairs are always writing memos to answering what it is we all do all the time and sort of on the defensive all the time and I do not like that very much.

Q: Thousands of mission statements and that sort of thing.

A: Yes, exactly.

Q: What lead you to think about retiring?

A: Well, I think that this is one of the things that a person has to decide for themselves and now that there is no mandatory retirement, there will be both people who retire

maybe too early and people who hang on forever. I decided that it was time. I have been teaching for 40 years. I want to write still and I just decided, and my husband also decided, that it was enough. I know that there are people who have a very hard time quitting, but I do not think I did. I am retired, but I still take an interest in the department and I have an office, which I share with my former student, who is an instructor. I just thought it was time. I really did not give it any other thought. I first went on this _____ in retirement, but my husband did not, he just quit one day and that was it!

Q: Over the years that you were in the department, did you see any changes in students?

A: I had very few undergraduate students. Because of the subjects that I taught, and because of teaching Polish Literature, which was required for a Ph.D. but there was always a majority of graduate students, and I would say graduate students are pretty much the same. Maybe they have changed some, but I do not think it is that noticeable to me. Undergraduates, everybody says that they have changed some, but I suppose if somebody decides to get a Ph.D. or even a masters, they usually have the same type of commitment.

Q: I think having spent most of your time with graduate students, you would not necessarily have the same feeling as someone who had spent more time with the undergraduates. What about KU as a university? How would you evaluate the university as a whole? Maybe your opinion has changed over the years as well.

A: No, I always thought that it was a very good university. It is what they call a research university. It has a very good library and I think that the professors here, this may sound cynical, but like professors everywhere else, they could be at Harvard, Yale, or Berkley. I also think this idea that students have there are good professors and bad professors, it is a lot of nonsense. I think that you get

something from everybody who is taught that much and studied that much. Unless a person is completely gone or something. I think you can study yourself to death if you take the proper courses. There are universities where things are stricter, but there are universities where things are much more lax. I know that we get these ratings as a play school, but then again it is undergraduate mostly. We get in these little books, whatever they are called. From that point of view, maybe the undergraduate programs are not as serious as I think.

Q: So you feel like KU was a good place for you?

A: Yes.

Q: You do not have any major quams with the university as a whole? Or the leadership?

A: No, I do not. If you go into central administration, and there are things, we for instance, both my husband and I think, that much too much attention is placed to sports. Sports are an integral part of the university, but there of course those are complaints when people have certain ideas how things should be.

Q: Do you feel like the leadership has stayed pretty much the same in terms of their goals and aims from the time that you came until now?

A: Probably not, but it is hard for me to put my finger on it because there are so many aspects to it. I do not know. At times the leadership does not seem to pay too much attention to the college or humanities and other times it seems like they try to _____. It is hard for me to tell. I think much depends on the deans of the college. I have worked here so many years now, I remember various deans and everybody has their favorite or ones that are not such favorites. I do not know. I think if you are in the central administration, like if you were an associate dean or something like that, you might have a better idea of what is right and what is wrong.

Q: You said that you hoped to do some writing. Are you going back to fiction and that sort of writing?

A: Yes. I like fiction mostly. I do not know yet exactly what, maybe short stories.

Q: Do you go back to Poland very often?

A: No. I have been the first time in Poland since we left in 46, in 94. Then I was invited by Polish television in 95 for an interview for a show so I was there again. I was going to go to Poland again. I had it all organized on September 11. I was ready to go to the airport. Now I do not know when I will go again.

Q: You may try to reschedule that possibly?

A: Not in the same area because I was going to speak at a conference and I do not know if this opportunity will come up again. Anyway, I will go sometime.

Q: Going way back, I meant to ask this earlier and we got sidetrack. When you married your husband and moved to America, your parents stayed in Munich?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they ever come over to see you.

A: Oh yes, many times.

Q: But they did not settle here?

A: It was hard at that time because of health insurance and various things. It was very hard for Europeans of a certain age to come here and settle permanently. They did stay several months each time they were here. They came to Lawrence at least twice maybe three times. They were at Bloomington. They were at Berkley.

Q: Do you think you will continue living in Lawrence?

A: I do not know. Moving is always very stressful and moving without just any particular reason, I do not know. We thought about it. I thought about it, but probably we will stay. We will probably take some trips and go somewhere in the winter. It is difficult to move from the way it is. There is really no particular purpose for us to move permanently. If you had some purpose, it would be different.

Q: Some people want to get away from the weather.

A: The weather would be the only thing probably, you know hot summer, cold winter.

Q: But a lovely fall! At least this fall was lovely that is for sure! Is there anything we have not talked about that concerns your life and career that we should talk about or any questions that I have not asked that you think might be important?

A: I cannot think of anything. I think we have touched upon everything. We talked about my writing and my teaching. Maybe I should mention this year before I retired, I received an award that I particularly liked and that is from the Center for Teaching Excellence for Graduates. That was the first award given for graduate teaching.

Q: That is an honor.

A: I particularly like that because that was voted in by our students.

Q: Are you still in touch with former graduate students?

A: Some. I see them at conferences and a lot of them are professors now. There are also students in the department that are still not finished with their dissertations and they have jobs here like in language lab etc.

Q: Will you continue to serve on their committees until they are finished?

A: Not unless they particularly ask for me. I would not volunteer for anything.

Q: Do you have grandchildren at this point?

A: We have one grandchild, Elizabeth has a son that is three years old.

Q: So traveling to Illinois might be on your agenda some of the time!

A: Yes.

Q: Mainly, you want to get back to your writing and see where that takes you at this phase of your life.

A: Yes, we may travel some too. Neither one of us is a great traveler, even though we have been to so many places.

Now with all the restrictions traveling by air, it is not very pleasant.

Q: If you cannot think of anything else, I thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed!

A: Thank you for asking me!