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Grand Opera: The Life, Languages, and Teaching of Miriam Ellis

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Grand Opera:
The Life, Languages, and Teaching of Miriam Ellis

Interviewed by Cameron Vanderscoff

Edited by Cameron Vanderscoff and Irene Reti



Miriam Ellis Speaking at Cowell College, Circa 2013

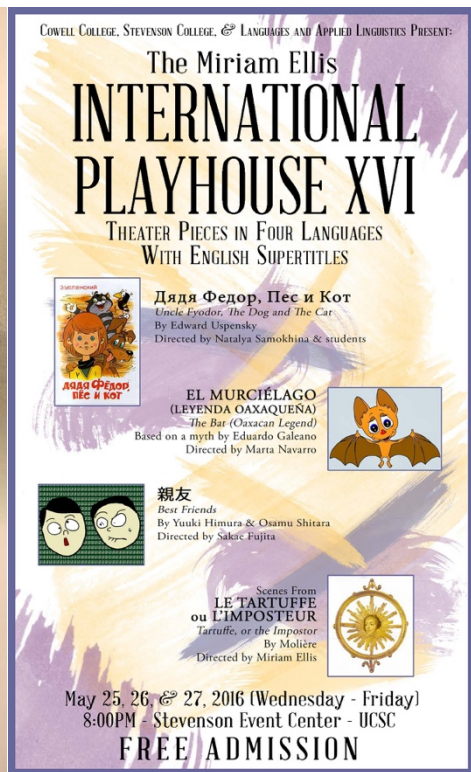
Santa Cruz

University of California, Santa Cruz

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2020

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A Gallery of Posters for the International Playhouse

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Introduction

“Bonjour, Monsieur Cameron, ça va?” “Oh, Bonjour Madame Miriam, ça va bien.” And then when I left her house, or we hung up the phone, *“Bonne journée, be safe, see you soon”* to which I would say, *“Si, es un plan—hasta muy pronto, no? Cuídase.”*

In order to understand Miriam Ellis and all she has to teach, the more languages you have, the better. Miriam is a linguistic *gran dame* with a small encyclopedia of tongues that she switches between with a fluidity that many of us struggle for even in our first language. And she isn't only a speaker of these languages, but a beloved teacher and a gifted translator of them, working with everything from Grand Opera arias to the plays of Lope de Vega. When I first moved to New York City in 2013 for graduate school, I lived in an institution called International House, and I would hear people in the corridors exchanging the words that evoked home. With Miriam Ellis, it was rather like that whole thirteen-story building was rolled up into one woman sitting in her living room.

Miriam exercises her polyglot chops with a palpable, infectious joy. I've been in circumstances where it can feel someone is showing off or being snobbish, looking down at someone who doesn't have the same proficiency. But that ain't Miriam. She rolls between languages, her eyes sparking and giving one of her expressive shrugs, and I always had the feeling that she was choosing that language in that moment because it was the right fit, that French or Spanish or whatever it was had the best exact color to bring out the nuance and sheen in what she was communicating.

In fact, Miriam has a love of human communication, of our efforts to reach one another in an often fractured and uneven world. I think she has a strongly felt sadness for the suffering that come when such communication fails—she grew up through World

War II—and a profound happiness when it works, when recognition triumphs from one soul to another, whether through one of Molière’s great plays or in a classroom of a Tuesday. This oral history is a chronicle of Miriam’s own journey as a gifted communicator, with a primary focus on her almost-fifty years at UC Santa Cruz.

Miriam Ellis was born in New York City in 1927 and was raised in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Flatbush. She was the child of Jewish immigrants who left what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. While the family struggled financially in the Depression, Miriam’s route to the world of language and interchange was laid out from an early age. As she puts it, “Our house was always open to immigrants, and so they came with all kinds of languages: German, Russian, Polish, or Hungarian, and I don’t know what all else.” As she says, culturally speaking, “the Other” wasn’t some feared or shadowy figure; they were always a human being, a guest there in her living room. Her father also had a remarkable gift with languages, speaking perhaps seven or eight, and her mother was such a well-known social and connective presence in the community she was nicknamed “The Alderman.”

As for Miriam, she fell especially in love with French language and theater through a program that was offered during WWII by the Free French government in exile; it was designed to preserve and promote French language and culture while France was occupied. The program included major prewar French film and acting luminaries. There, Miriam was exposed to Molière (“the love of my life”), Corneille, Racine, and other great French playwrights; for her, the love of language and love of literature, creative expression, and culture have long been intertwined.

When she was twenty-one, Miriam went to France for the first time to volunteer in a postwar displaced persons camp, serving refugees who had been driven from North Africa and parts of the Middle East by fascist occupation and war. There, while struggling

at times to understand the many cultures at work, her own feminist consciousness was shaped by seeing that women in the camps were often marginalized or mistreated.

After the war, she came back home with her first husband, a veteran of the Royal Air Force. With kids in tow, in 1955 they drove across the country and set up a new life in Southern California. As her husband ran an auto business specializing in working on British cars, Miriam was at home raising their three children. Miriam says of being a homemaker, "I loved it *jusqu'à un certain point*, up to a certain point." While she loved her children, in the era leading up to Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, Miriam knew "I wanted more than just being a mother or a wife of a businessperson. I needed more than that."

In the forties, Miriam had completed high school prior to going overseas, but hadn't been inspired by a brief stint in college at the time. As a mother of three, she picked back up and started taking night classes in 1957. She then spent the next twenty-two years gradually and steadfastly working through a series of degrees while balancing her many other obligations. She also kept up her passion for theater in these years and acted in regional productions. Miriam secured a bachelor's degree (*summa cum laude*) and master's degree from CSU Northridge (then San Fernando Valley State) by the mid 1960s, when she was in her late 30s. Miriam had a special passion for connecting and working with international students, and soon added another responsibility to her list: she joined the staff at the university as director of the Office of International Programs. Like her own parents, she invited people from all over the world into her home to talk, share culture, and socialize; as she puts it, "The Other was very welcome." Miriam fought a hard uphill battle for international student programs at a time when then-governor of California Ronald Reagan was slashing budgets; ultimately, faced with an unsupportive and sexist

supervisor on campus and declining statewide support for the very idea of international exchange, she stepped down from her position.

It was then the late 60s and early 70s, a “time of great foment” in America. Miriam felt that “zeitgeist” too, and she decided start yet another chapter of her life. In 1971, she came north to UC Santa Cruz as a PhD student studying primarily French and Spanish literature. In time, she and her husband divorced; Miriam found herself on a young, still-forming campus—it was just six years old at the time—where two of her children also went through as undergrads. They were all part of the incredible spark of the original UCSC experiment. Miriam herself was inspired, saying, “*Incroyable, j’étais absolument frappée, incroyablement...*and to see those trees, those magnificent trees, and thinking, immediately being transported to the idea of being able to sit under those trees and open the books and pursue knowledge in a setting like this. How could one fail to be inspired?”

Miriam has stayed ever since, and has left an outsize mark on the campus. She completed her PhD and her twenty-two year journey as a so-called “re-entry” student in 1979, at age fifty-one.¹ She recalls thriving as a grad student in what she remembers as a joyous, small-scale, and creative atmosphere. Miriam was also a key figure in building up theater at UCSC, especially outside of the English language. Her first major endeavor was as an assistant director for a production of *L’avare* (*The Miser*). She also became a protagonist in the story of opera at UCSC, working as stage director for the Opera Workshop in the 70s.

In fact, Miriam has been involved in a staggering amount of artistic productions over the years both on and off campus, from her labors for French theater to co-founding the Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc. (SCOSI) Miriam has brought town and gown together

¹ Miriam says, on being called a “re-entry student,” “I’d always object, I said, ‘Oh, am I re-entering from outer space?’ Yes, I’m coming back into this cosmos from another one.” [laughter]

in a rare way and has been an all-around champion of the arts, launching productions, hosting talks, bringing in world-class performers, and initiating community outreach programs—including performances of theatrical and operatic selections for local schools and nursing homes. Throughout, she has been animated by a popular vision of these art forms; for Miriam, theater and opera aren't just high culture for the initiated who can afford tickets to the Met in black tie. In fact, when Miriam talks about Jean Giraudoux or Mozart or Baudelaire—in our sessions she quoted from his *Les Fleurs du mal* from memory—or Gaetano Donizetti, her enthusiasm is infectious; instead of being an exclusion, it's an invitation to join her in a fabulous world of creativity and expression.

This invitational and encouraging quality also manifests in her primary official role at UCSC, where she has been a longtime lecturer. She started teaching while still a grad student, and then carried on as a lecturer after her PhD in '79 and clear through the early 2000s. Since then, she has continued to periodically teach classes for UCSC and for the campus' Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, most recently in 2018, when she was ninety. Along the way, Miriam has taught courses on opera, literatures across multiple languages, and many other subjects; her most consistent offering has been her French classes. She has been beloved as a teacher by generations of students, and has been an important figure in advocating for language program over the years, including helping secure six-figure National Endowment for the Humanities grants; she has also put in volumes of sweat equity in a variety of teaching, service, and leadership roles. Her CV was dozens of pages long as of 2019, each line a testament to the remarkable labor she had dedicated to UCSC and the Santa Cruz community.²

² See Miriam's CV in the appendix of this oral history for more on her involvements.

Unfortunately, Miriam also makes clear that all of that care was often not reciprocated by the institution itself. Miriam has long been a clear-eyed critic of a reality which has lately reached crisis proportions in the academy: the entire institution's reliance on and exploitation of lecturers, who are often underpaid and overworked, and typically have little or no job security. As Miriam puts it, both as a grad student and as a lecturer she was a "second-class citizen" on campus, without the status, remuneration, or stability afforded to professors. She points out that she has the same qualifications—a PhD, in her case from UCSC—and has also given papers at conferences, just like professors do. She's even received the *Chevalier des Palmes académiques*, a distinctive honor bestowed by the French government. But nonetheless, in the language program they were required to teach eight courses a year instead of the four required of professors, and faced condescending and sometimes adversarial views about language study and the very role of lecturers. Among other indications of this attitude, they were denied formal status as "faculty," and assigned the title of "temporary academic staff." As Miriam puts it, "The idea of 'temporary' is really one that, shall we say, grates just a teeny bit? From the standpoint that it will be almost fifty, forty-nine years now, that I've been associated with the campus." In this oral history, Miriam instead paints a compelling picture of a reality where lecturers like her are indispensable to the actual educational functioning of the institution, nurturing students and carrying out frontline teaching.

Many commentators in the Regional History Project archive suggest that UCSC has lost its founding spirit, in part due to moving away from its original commitment to undergraduate education. Miriam's story suggests that, to extent that this spirit and this dream survives today, it's due in large part to the unrecognized labor and dedication of lecturers. Miriam also shares trenchant observations about gender at UCSC and in our wider society, and relates her personal interest in serving other "re-entry" students,

especially women who were returning to school after other chapters in their life. Today, as there is nationwide debate and uproar about the rights of lecturers and graduate students, Miriam's words, based on her own experiences going back to the 70s, resonate in a way that is more timely and powerful than ever.

In all, Miriam has what could be called a grassroots or communal vision of university life. As she puts it, "I guess that's the story in life of those who get the kudos and the *réclame*, the acclaim, and those who quietly work behind the obvious activities to make things happen." While she is self-effacing about her own contributions, she emphasizes her bonds of collegueship with and the work of fellow lecturers and some professors. She recounts how the language program team went the extra distance for their pupils, putting on not only plays, but special events like the *Foire française* (French Fair) and an immersion quarter abroad in Nîmes, France. In Miriam's model, like the best examples of the early UCSC college system, learning is a shared endeavor that runs in many directions, not just top-down.

In recent years, mostly since her nominal retirement, Miriam has remained dedicated to working for a multilingual UCSC, a place where language study is valued, and where perspectives across lingual and international borders are welcomed and celebrated. In 2001, Miriam founded what was then called the International Playhouse, a capstone for her decades of language theater work on campus. In the Playhouse, held annually, language students act out scenes and short plays in the language they are studying before a town-gown audience. It's an expression of Miriam's philosophy of the pedagogical power of theater, which goes all the way back to the Free French language and theater program she was in herself as a teenager in World War II New York. Every

year since,³ Miriam has gotten personally involved in the final rehearsals (“Hell Week”), bringing her high standards with her. And Miriam knows quality—she has brought some operatic heavy hitters to Santa Cruz over the years, and has a personal letter of recommendation from the celebrated French absurdist Ionesco (she worked as his translator when he visited UCSC). Even though it’s amateur theater, she does her best to whip the students into shape; by the end of the run, she likes to say, “hopefully it will be almost, as I like to tell my students in French, ‘*Presque pas mal*,’ which means ‘almost not bad.’ That’s my highest form of praise, *presque pas mal*.” She says the students, for their part, probably wonder “Who is this dotty old lady coming in at the last minute?” But she provides immediate feedback—she doesn’t believe in giving notes—often unexpectedly in the language of the play in question, like Russian, which she doesn’t remember well anymore, but enough that “I can say things like *khorosho*, which means good. I can say *plokho*, which means poor; lousy—that one I remember. [*laughs*]”⁴

Today, Miriam is in her 90s and continues to live in Santa Cruz. Sadly, her beloved second husband, Paul, passed away in recent years after many close and loving decades together. She recalled to me with a laugh that when she was asked to squire the Ionescos around campus right before her PhD dissertation was due, Paul volunteered to type the whole tome up to keep her on time for submission. She shared many other caring stories about him with me when we were talking off the record.

Perhaps not surprisingly, retirement continues to be a highly relative term for Miriam. The International Playhouse was renamed the Miriam Ellis International Playhouse in recognition of her contributions. Gifts came from far and wide, but the key

³ In 2020, the program was cancelled for the first time, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴ The Playhouse has become a beloved institution. It has featured plays in many languages, often on the same bill, including Spanish, Russian, Japanese, French, Punjabi, German, Italian, Chinese, and Hebrew.

donation was from Marieke Rothschild, who had been one of those ‘re-entry’ students who Miriam had recognized potential in and mentored. Meanwhile, in 2016, a new revision of Ellis’ translation of *Le Nozze de Figaro* came out, with her translating the libretto and UCSC professor Sherwood Dudley working on the score. Dudley described her to me in a phone call as “the most talented translator I have ever known, or known of”; he cites her “obsession” with minute detail combined with a rare eye and ear for the cadential flow of the words in the original. He says that her translations don’t just excel as prose, but also move as poetry, including meter and rhyme. Today, Miriam continues to translate articles, arias, operas, and more for ResMusica, a classical music web site, and *Opéra* magazine; she is already past seventy-five translations, and is aiming for 100. She had hoped to teach again soon, but the COVID-19 pandemic has put that in doubt. Miriam assured me that she is “like a vampire” in that she draws energy and vitality from students, and has every intention of keeping on going in her work as long as she can.

Our interview sessions were conducted in person at her home on the West Side of Santa Cruz in September and October of 2019. Miriam sat on her couch and I sat opposite her in a kind of Eames chair. Her daughter Vicki, who Miriam lives with—two of Miriam’s three children went to UCSC as well, overlapping with her own doctoral years—and Miriam would set out a spread of juices and sparkling water and cookies for me. Our sessions together were a journey, spread out over late summer and early fall afternoons. Before we sat down for our first session, she laughed and said, “Oh, my oral historian—I’ve always wanted one of those.... All you’re asking me for, young man, is a synopsis of life...nothing to it.”

Throughout, I loved being Miriam’s student and her oral historian, hanging on her every phrase. When she spoke in a different language, she usually translated, but not always, and so it required a whole other level of listening and attention from me as a

practitioner, thinking up Latinate roots and trying to connect dots. English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Russian were all used in the interview to varying degrees. And while Miriam is a language maven, I'm at best ad hoc. English is fine, but outside of that it declines fast; my Spanish can negotiate me from point A to B in a basic sense; in French or Italian, it's just a word or phrase here and there. Let's just say that when I travel, I have a well-developed ability for pantomime combined with a high threshold for social embarrassment, leading to many semi-lingual and highly expressive exchanges with strangers that are mainly dominated by mutual laughter as we try to piece back together a few bricks of Babel. I can say that my interview with Miriam is certainly the only time I've had a live language lesson on tape, with her looking at me expectantly until I uttered a passable imitation of the various French open vowel sounds she was trying to teach me. She would model the correct sound, and I, like a slow parrot, would get close, but not quite there.

It's safe to say we had a famous time, and I'm indebted to Miriam. Since then we've stayed in touch; in times of COVID, she told me over the phone, "It's one world, and it's one planet, and we are facing that one shining, or maybe not so shining light at the end of the tunnel. Just a matter of when and how we go, and that's it. And that's a good ideal to end it. I'm send you a great big unmicrobial hug!" As we went through the editorial process, Miriam remained self-deprecating about her oral history ("this lurid past of mine...is not going to win any prizes at the state fair!"), which I assured her was not the case. She also reflected on the many "cycles" she has lived through in her life, and offered some sage words about this fraught time: "Keep on keeping well, and keeping away from temptation to go back to quote, 'normal' life. Because this is the new normal. Remember, life is change. And this is changing."

As for what comes next, she once told me, laughing, “I hope I can die on campus!” She intends to keep working on her projects and minding her health. I, for one, think there’s a lot we can learn from Miriam. She is animated by a humane vision of our ability to connect with one another as people. She is a true communicator, and in times like these of such great static and broken telephone lines from soul to soul, I think there are profound lessons there. She reflected sadly in one session that “you can’t go home again,” because, again, home is always changing, and you yourself are always changing. I think her life story points us towards embracing those changes, and communicating as we go through them. As she puts it, “And as I always say, my cliché, no matter how diverse the cultures, no matter how different the personalities, we always come to the same conclusion: we have so much in common. It’s called being human. And that’s where we always end. And that’s the beauty of the whole thing, because it’s true.” For Miriam, this doesn’t mean eliding difference, but celebrating it and communicating through it, the way she learned in Depression-era Flatbush, Brooklyn, and the way she’s still teaching today in Santa Cruz in 2020.

Before closing, I’d like to thank the village who made this project possible. First, I would like to, as Miriam would put it, take off *mon chapeau* to Marieke Rothschild, Miriam’s former UCSC student and a great supporter of the campus. Marieke not only was a key figure in endowing the Playhouse, but generously provided the funding for this oral history, knowing her teacher’s story should be preserved. In a phone conversation, Marieke remembered a genuine, caring, but precise and exacting educator who she wanted to thank. Sure enough, Marieke made this all possible with her support, and I’ll be long grateful for that—as will the fortunate folks who get to encounter this story in the future.

I'd also like to thank Kathleen Rose, an alum and trustee of the UCSC Foundation, who first called me to propose that we ought to do an oral history of Miriam. She has been wonderful, shepherding the project along and helping it become an official library effort. We had great conversations in between the demands of avocado-picking season on her land. Appreciation also goes out to former Cowell provost Faye Crosby, who got on the phone with me and helped my research and understanding of Miriam's contributions—always a pleasure, Faye. Faye was also a great supporter of the Playhouse. And there were more individuals who gave freely of their time to help me get more detail on Miriam: a thank you to Lilli Hunter, who cast light on SCOSI and Miriam's outsize profile in the community, and to Sherwood Dudley, who brought a rich perspective as Miriam's longtime collaborator. Thanks also goes out to Renée Cailloux, now co-producer of the Playhouse, for sharing resources and footage and insights with me. Much gratitude goes forth to Miriam's daughter Vicki, who always received me kindly and took time out of her day to help out our sessions. And on a special personal note, special love and thanks to the late John Dizikes, who was much present in these sessions, and dear to Miriam and I in our different ways; John passed away by the time we started, but it felt powerful to speak of him together.

There were many other folks involved, too. A particular appreciation is due to my UCSC D2 Village buddy, Colin Geraci, and his parents Daniel and Deirdre Geraci, who hosted me in Pescadero while I was interviewing Miriam. Each morning I'd wave to them and drive down the sweep of Highway One, and return to their unstinting hospitality each night, taking in the stars from the porch and shooting the breeze. I've always felt at home there.

What's more, the transcribing and editing of this piece was a unique process. Thank you to the Audio Transcription Center, which handled the multilingual demands

of the recordings. In my own preparation and editorial process, I found myself calling on friends for their topical expertise. Thank you to my old hometown friend Emma Bushnell, now of Brooklyn, for being my go-to consultant on all things opera. Thank you to Raphaëlle Martin, who was a volunteer on-call French-language expert out of Paris, generously fielding even my most américain questions and illuminating the (to me) arcane ways of the Académie française. Also sending a thank you to Catalina Plua, who was there to offer Spanish insights and patient education from Quito, Ecuador.

In the UCSC library, a huge cheer for Irene Reti, as always. She gracefully managed the transition of this project into the library, and we truly forged together through the challenges it presented. Her leadership always inspires me to do better, and I can't imagine this oral history, or, in fact, any of my work, without her caring mentorship. Special thanks as well to Teresa Mora, the wonderful Head of Special Collections, for her unstinting support of this project.

In closing, a huge thank you (and *merci beaucoup*) to Miriam, for reminding us that life is changes, and the more words, languages, and ways of understanding you have, the readier you are. Miriam teaches that language is a way to bring us together and understand one another, not divide us. In our sessions, she often wondered if she was saying too much, but I assure you, Miriam, in fact we need more knowledge from you and folks like you out in the world, who believe in the *potential* of human communication. That's true in this time of quarantine and pandemic more than ever.

Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library's website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Teresa Mora and University Librarian Elizabeth Cowell.

—Cameron Vanderscoff, Interviewer & Co-Editor

July 30th, 2020, New York, New York



Student Performers at Miriam Ellis's Opera Workshop, 1978. Photo by UCSC Photography Services.

[All sessions took place in the living room of Miriam Ellis' house on the west side of Santa Cruz. Miriam sat on a couch, often with stacks of her playbills and other ephemera from her career at her side for reference. Cameron sat opposite her in a sort of Eames chair. Miriam's daughter, Victoria, was usually in a nearby room of the house. Mother and daughter always had a spread of cookies, Martinelli's cider, and other sweets and drinks set out on the nearby dining table. When the tape turned on for this opening session, Miriam had just started recounting the circumstances under which she first came to UCSC, and subsequently how she came to switch her college affiliation from Merrill to Cowell.]

Prologue

Ellis: —since, oh, I don't know what, the eighties? Somewhere in there.

When I first came, I came to do my doctorate here. So, it's part of the saga. And so, I started. They put me up at Merrill first. I was there for a while. And then one fine day, this committee of Cowellies came over to Merrill to see me. They said, "How would you like to come to Cowell?" I said, "Oh, I'd love to," because all my friends were there, all my colleagues—languages, everything—they were all at Cowell.

I came in '71. In 1972, I started to do French theater. The wonderful woman who was the activities director, you may have known her, Angie, Angie Christmann—I don't know if you did know Angie—was such a wonderful help. She said, "Oh, you've got to come and do your plays at Cowell." So, I was doing the French theater project, which I did almost annually, until I got involved with the Opera Workshop with Sherwood [Dudley]. That was in about the mid-seventies or so—I don't remember exactly—and so I was doing productions with him. So, I

gave up the French theater productions during the years when I was doing the opera productions. But pretty much, I would say that every year, just about from 1972 till 2001, off and on, I was doing theater in French once a year as a kind of a manifestation of what language students were capable of doing, and what the language program could offer the campus.

We never charged. It's always been free admission. Frequently I wanted, of course, to pay the audience, all seven of them. [*Vanderscoff laughs*] Because this is way before the days of anything like titles. We had no super titles; we had no nothing. Either you knew what they were saying or—and there was something in the program, of course, a little précis and so forth. But you know, it's not the same as having a language you understand.

Vanderscoff: So, I think that does a fabulous job of setting the stage for this world of theater, French theater, that you helped make at UCSC in the seventies. But I wonder, would you mind if we went back into some of your own biography and to some of your own pathway into that work.

Early Life and Family History

Ellis: My own life changed when I was seventeen. It was one of those crazy stories. I was taking French—you know, whatever they were giving, the higher class of French, whatever it was. I took four years of French in high school. And I think I took five years of Spanish, too. I got in extra classes because I was always interested in language.

And so, on a Friday, the French teacher announced that there was going to be a contest the following day up in the Bronx— Oh, naturally, I was born in New York. We didn't mention that.

Vanderscoff: Well yes, so could you just say when and where you were born, and a bit about your earliest years? And then we'll walk back to that revelatory experience.

Ellis: Oh, okay. I've just had my *cumpleaños* in August—

Vanderscoff: *Felicidades.* [laughs]

Ellis: —which was a nine and a two. I was born in '27. So that makes me now a nonagenarian or whatever, with a couple of extra years there. So that's where I'm up to.

I lived in New York until I became twenty-one. That was when the war was ended—well, it ended in '45, I believe. And in '48, I told my parents—I was suffering terrible guilt for not having contributed enough to the war, or, you know, more than I could do, which was silly things, making toys for children in hospitals, doing all kinds of saving things, working on drives, trying to roll out bandages. I did the work for the Red Cross—do all the things that a young person can do at a time like that.

It was a most dreadful time, those war years. There's a picture behind you of my dear, dear brother in his uniform. Can you see? It's just pretty much on your eye level, a little bit—that one right there. [*Vanderscoff finds the right picture*] That was my brother as a deck second officer on a merchant marine vessel. He became an officer in the merchant marine corps. I had a cousin who was also in the merchant marine. He was torpedoed, and he was on a raft

for several weeks until they were found. Things like that happened in my family—and, of course, what was going on in Europe, the horrors.

We always had, Cameron, a very open house. My father was a struggling—and I do mean “struggling”—extraordinarily honest, a man of great honesty and integrity who set down very high parameters for his children to follow in terms of idealism. He was also a dedicated student. He had about seven or eight languages. He had gone back to polish up his Italian, [late in life] for no particular reason, just because he loved languages and he was very good at languages.

I think I must have gotten a bit of genetic material in that regard because I love languages, too. Not only do I love communicating, but I love making the beauties, the importance, the cultural differences, the demands, the rewards of that language accessible to non-speakers—you know, to translate. I love to be able to put the wonders of this other mode of expression in the hands of those who don’t have that. We live in such a monolingual society, really, when you come right down to it.

In my house, there were always people coming in and out. No matter how poor we were, we always had a piano. There was always music. I was one of four children. One, sadly, had died of diphtheria two years before I was born, which is why I supposedly was born, according to my mother, to take his place. And so, we had four children in a three-room apartment. When I was born, we actually owned a house. But then came the big crash, and we lost the house.⁵

⁵ The Crash of '29.

Vanderscoff: Where was the house?

Ellis: The house was in Brooklyn. I was born at Long Island College Hospital, which is on Long Island, I believe, from its name.⁶ But we lived pretty much in Brooklyn, and always in apartments. Once we lost the house, we never had a house again in the family. So that when I came to California much later on, at the behest of my grandmother—my grandmother kept encouraging my husband and me to go to California, “That’s the place for you,” because she knew how much we loved nature. And the story before that is that we had met and married in the south of France, right on the shore of the Mediterranean. So, once you have that south of France in your blood, it’s kind of hard to settle for going back to the big walk-ups and the no-tree in-Brooklyn. No going back to, need I tell *you* about New York and it’s not exact, shall we say, deepest relation in the world with nature?⁷

Vanderscoff: What was the name of the neighborhood you grew up within Brooklyn?

Ellis: Flatbush. I believe it was called Flatbush.

Vanderscoff: You talked a little bit about your father’s love of languages. What sort of languages were around Flatbush? What was Flatbush like?

Ellis: Our house was always open to immigrants, and so they came with all kinds of languages: German, Russian, Polish, or Hungarian, and I don’t know what all else. Of course, they were all learning English as best they could. And yeah, we just always had music, and the “other” was always welcome in our house. My parents had been brought here when they

⁶ There was a Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn (which itself is on Long Island).

⁷ The interviewer lives in New York City.

were two or three months old, so you can really say that they were almost born here, pretty close to that—that huge wave of immigrants in the late nineteenth century that came from all over Europe.

Vanderscoff: Where did they come from?

Ellis: They came from what was then called the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which became Romania and Hungary and I don't know whatnot else, you know, all these other little states it got chopped up into.

And so, languages, yes. Language was always kind of warp and woof. I suspect that with your name that it is not very far distant from your past, as well; that you have been linguistically enhanced in your lifetime, not having just English in your life. Is that wrong of me to think that, or—?

Vanderscoff: Well, Vanderscoff is Americanized Dutch. It used to be “van der Schaaf.” Then it became “Vanderscoff.”

Ellis: From the “Schaaf?” What is “Scoff?”

Vanderscoff: Well, “scoff” is just some American version of the—

Ellis: Stuyvesant, perhaps, or something, whatever the name was.⁸

Vanderscoff: Yeah, some long Dutch—

⁸ Stuyvesant is a common place name in New York City, dating back to Dutch New York.

Ellis: Yeah, yeah.

Vanderscoff: —lots of vowels, you know. But in terms of your own family, so what did you know about your family history? Did you ever hear stories?

Ellis: Well, I'm sure I did. But I never cared about genealogy, even when I was a kid. I never cared about the past. I always cared about the present and the future more than the past. I broke away from religion very, very early because of that. I was not interested in that. Of course, my whole family was very pious, naturally. I was the rebel, so tough. But they didn't disenfranchise me. They were very kind and open and kept me as part of their own. So that was nice of them.

Vanderscoff: And what was your family's religion?

Ellis: They were Orthodox Jews who had suffered a good deal. Their families had suffered, as you know. And what was interesting is what happened in the marriages of my family: my oldest sister married a Russian who had fled pogroms, one in which he was almost killed himself. His whole family was right there when the Cossacks came with their knives brandished. And he always told a story about—his father was a very learned and very famous singer, a cantor, and was not home when this happened. And his mother—Leo was his name, Leo's mother—Leo always told the story about his mother, who approached this young fellow who was there to kill them. He had hurt his hand. She saw he had some kind of a scruffy bandage. So, she rebandaged his hand for him, and she took him under her motherly wing and tried to help him. And so, he spared killing the young children in the family and the mother; he spared their lives. And so, my brother-in-law had to run—they ran away. During

the night, they fled under cover of darkness. Saved their lives, made their way to America, those who survived.

Vanderscoff: So, you heard those stories from your brother, but—

Ellis: I heard those stories from—

Vanderscoff: —not from your own family.

Ellis: No, not from my own family. No, because my family had migrated before and had not been in Russia. They had not, luckily. They had had other forms of bigotry, you know. One could not live without having manifestations. If you were just born the wrong person, by color of your skin, or the kind of deity that you believed in, or whatever turned you on mythologically, or familiarly, genealogically, whatever— Well, I turned away from religion at a very early age, because I just couldn't swallow the myths or whatever—whatever it was, never mind. But that's just a little side, a very personal comment. And my children, as well, as very atheistically inclined. My son has just retired after his twenty-four, twenty-five-year stint with NASA—he was a biologist whom they hired with the possibility that there may be life out there, and decided they had to have a biologist on hand. So yeah, my dear John. He is, at the moment, with his Danish wife. There's another element that we have added to the family.

My youngest sister married one of the survivors of Auschwitz. I think he was in Treblinka too. He was in two or three of those hellholes. The most magnanimous human being you could want to meet. He was marvelous. He was given a big award in New York by, I don't remember the name of the association, the national-something of Catholics and Jews,

something. I don't know if you've heard of it, but it's a big, prestigious, kind of like a rotary club for believers or whatever, you know, high-ups in business. They gave this fellow an award for outstanding service because he, having survived the hell of the camps, devoted his entire life to trying to help, to heal, to make an easier road for all sorts of people who were suffering financially in whatever way he could. Such a marvelous man.

He got regular beatings. He was about fourteen or fifteen when he was in the camps. And they used to hit him in the head, all the time, just pro forma; just because he *was*, right, they would hit. So, he used to suffer horrible headaches while he was driving frequently to and from work. He had a big commute. And he would have to pull over to the side of the road because he couldn't see. He was having double vision, or I don't know what. He had the vestigial traces yet of what he had gone through in the camps.

And I can never eat pasta, to this day, without being reminded of a tale that he told me, that he was once working in the kitchen in the camps, and there were two or three strands of macaroni on the ground. He bent over to pick them up. And the guard beat him in the head for daring to do something like that. I mean, they were not even cooked. They were raw strands of pasta. That always still reminds me of that story, of how they beat him so mercilessly. Morris, Morris, what a fine human being he was. I can't even begin to tell you of his kindness and his generosity and his caring for others.

When I lived in the displaced persons camps—well, that's not part of the childhood, I guess I'll skip back to that.⁹

⁹ See later in this oral history for more on Miriam Ellis's time volunteering in a displaced persons' camp after the war.

Centre de l'art dramatique, appliqué à l'étude du français,

Center of Theater Arts, New York City

Yeah, so when I was seventeen, I had that chance to go to this contest from the French government. They were trying to keep the French language alive. This was not the occupied French government. The Free French government was trying to do this.¹⁰ They started a troupe in New York City of high school seniors or students who were proficient enough in the language to be able to handle this kind of demand, to do theater in the language. And so, we started the—the title is about that long [*indicates lengthy space*] The title of it was the *École libre*—you know the New School that's in the Village? You've heard of the New School, or seen it, I'm sure.¹¹ [*Vanderscoff indicates yes*] That's the official entity with which it was associated. So, it was called the *École libre*—the Free School—*des hautes études*—of High Studies, or Advanced Studies. And the subdivision that I was in was called the *Centre de l'art dramatique, appliqué à l'étude du français*, or the Center of Theater Arts, applied to the Study of French.¹² So that was the title of the program to which I won a scholarship.

I worked with Madame Ève Daniël, who had married an American and migrated to the U.S. She had been an *associée*, working with members of the *Comédie Française* for many years. And when the chance came for her to come to the States and to be part of this project, she was very pleased to be able to work towards keeping her language and culture before the American public. She lived down in the Village. And she had great connections. She knew some of the contemporary playwrights in France. She knew Jean Benoît-Lévy, who was a

¹⁰ During the war, there was an occupied French Vichy government, and the Free French government in exile.

¹¹ The New School was and is based in lower Manhattan.

¹² We've used French language convention for capitalization of French language titles like this.

Frenchman in exile, a film director who wrote and directed a very famous film, which was called *Le feu dans la paille*, *The Fire in the Straw*, *The Straw Fire*, which was about survival, pretty much. Benoît-Lévy was also part of this French theater group, as was a fellow named Charles Boyer. Charles Boyer¹³ was part of the advisory committee that was involved with this project for young American students, as a means of demonstrating the unconquerable spirit of the Free French. Overall, we had quite a prestigious support group behind us, as well as much moral support from the large Francophile public in New York during those difficult days.

Vanderscoff: What drew you to the French language in particular, of all the languages your father spoke—?

Ellis: Oh, that's a very good question. Because my mother had a brother who was a very dear uncle to me, too—to all of us. He was a dear, sweet, giving man—with a hell of a temper. You never wanted to get him angry. I remember that as a little kid, being so afraid of him if he was angry. [*laughs*] He had been in the First World War. He was called a *poilu*; that is to say, a “hairy one.” That's what they called the Americans who came to help them out, the *poilus*. And he had gone to France. He had been stationed there and he even married a French woman. They finally got divorced after the war or whatever—that didn't last. You know, those war marriages were always iffy things and wore off and quite frequently were only short-lived.

¹³ Ellis delivers his name first in a French pronunciation and then in an American English pronunciation. Boyer was a celebrated Academy Award-nominated French American actor.

He came back to the bosom of the family. I was kind of, not exactly his favorite, but he loved me quite a lot and paid a lot of attention to me. So, he would teach me little French songs. I was only a little kid. I don't know, I was—let's see, when was the First World War? That was 1914-1918. I must have been with Uncle Harry—that was Uncle Harry, who was a great influence on my life, too. He was always doing something—fixing or building or making or improving. He was always busy doing. So, he always used to say, "Come on, Mitchie." I had a nickname, of course. Little kids always did. And, "Come on, Mitchie. You come and help me!" So, I'm helping him: "Hand me the hammer," you know, "Give me a nail." I was a big help for whatever he was doing. He always made me feel very special. And so, he taught me these little French songs that he had learned while he was in France. It was so sweet. That's what really got me interested in French.

And then from there, I just went on to study it in school. Then I went to the theater project. That, of course, made it very much ingrained, very much a part of my being. Because I played all sorts of parts. And we didn't have many men, because there were still the offshoots of the war going on. There weren't that many male students who were involved. There were some who were very good—I remember some, became very friendly with them. So sometimes I would put on a moustache and play a French part, too. It was great fun. [*laughs*]

Vanderscoff: What kind of rep were you doing there?

Ellis: Oh, we were doing everything from the classics, everything from Racine, Corneille, and, of course, Molière. It's where I met Molière, the love of my life, Molière. I never got over my Molière flame—he's marvelous. Then we would do contemporary works, which nobody knew about yet. They were just being either censored by the occupied French.

Vanderscoff: The Vichy French?

Ellis: —or, if they were allowed out to be printed elsewhere, they were usually published somewhere else, not in Paris. Often, they were published in England. They were smuggled out and published. So, we did, for example, we did some Giraudoux, who was just then in the top of his career. I remember that we did the *Antigone*, too, of—well, there was one by Garnier from the Middle Ages. But we did a more contemporary one, as well, a more contemporary *Antigone, Antigone*.¹⁴ It was by Jean Anouilh and a very successful play. He wrote *Waltz of the Toreadors* and *Voyager without Baggage*, as well.

I can't remember too many more that we did, at the moment, oh well.

Yes, we did all kinds of different plays. There was a great deal of challenge, to say the least, in developing— And that's where I also developed. From Madame Daniël, I learned about what's important in theater. The thing that Aristotle said in his *Poetics* about what was important in a tragedy—he had these six guidelines, and for him, the least important was spectacle, which seems to be the most important element in all sorts of American entertainment, sadly to say. You know, you have to have something exploding or something coming in from outer space and landing. You have to have the spectacle—it's what many audiences seem to think it's all about.

In our group, it was the actor and the text, or the text and the actor, whichever way you want to put it. And it was the language. It was the meaning. It was the emotion. It was the subtlety.

¹⁴ Pronounced in French, then English.

It was the nuance. It was the message. It was to make visible what was invisible, to make clear what was just implied, that sort of thing. You know, really working deeply with the text.

So, we had very little in the way of décor. Which I do, even today with my theater programs, we're lucky if we have a flat. We have a door at Cowell, which sometimes opens, and sometimes doesn't, built into one of our flats. And then we have a couple of flats that can be painted. And then we have a table, or maybe two tables. We have two, or a group of chairs. *Et c'est tout*, that's it.

The Eastern Europeans, at one point in, I think it was the sixties, had what they called "the poor theater": very little in the way of visual embellishment. And that's what I still do: the poor theater. Well, first of all, because when we started out here on campus, we had zero in terms of financial support. So, I had to scrounge for everything, and that was a good reason. And then secondly, because that's the way I was trained. It isn't really important how fancy the décor is. The audience should not come and applaud the scenery. They should applaud the actors, we hope.

Vanderscoff: So, you had this experience of immersion. You said that it was your teacher who told you about this opportunity first, the scholarships to go—

Ellis: Yes, yes. Because there was somebody signed up in the class who was supposed to go to this contest. It was actually a contest, because there was an award; there was a scholarship award. And so, another person in the class had prepared to go to this event, because it was for the entire city, all of the high schools. I think maybe some of the colleges were even involved, I don't know. It was held at Barnard, I remember.

So, the teacher announced it, and she said, “So and so was supposed to go, but she’s sick, so she can’t go. So, does somebody want to go?” I said, “Well, I won’t have time to memorize anything from today until tomorrow.” It was hardly what you’d call enough time. So she said, “Oh, well, that’s all right. You can explain it, and you can just maybe read something.” So that’s what I did.

So luckily, it was a long trip on the subway from my house to Barnard, which was upper Manhattan, I believe.

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Ellis: I had lots of time on the train. So, I took out my copy of, I think, I don’t remember which Molière. It was one of Molière’s plays. I really loved him. I loved his humor, and his treatment of women, and his understanding of psychology. And his witty—his use of language and his understanding of relationships and all of that. I still do admire him enormously.

So, I went through it. I read this text on the train going up there. I arrived and I explained to Madame Danièl, with whom I immediately felt a great rapport. She was such a wonderful—I don’t know if you know—you’re probably too young—but there was a French movie star named Danielle Darrieux. She was great. She had these thin eyebrows, which she used a lot, [*indicates, laughs*] and a very fluid face, and was an excellent actress. Madame Danièl reminded me of her. She looked something like her, in her *persona*. She smoked like five chimneys, nonstop—oh, it’s a wonder that they lived at all, those people. She was so tremendously gifted. She could take this group of raw students who knew nothing of this art

form, of this high level of understanding of relationships, of the difference between the real and the artificial, and the superficial and the concrete—

Oh, I think, could you please just switch that on? I think it's still plugged in.

Vanderscoff: Sure, the fan?

Ellis: Yes, I would really appreciate it. I'm getting to be too warm. Yes, just one is good. [*sound of clicking as Vanderscoff adjusts the fan to "one"*] That's fine, yeah. First one is fine, yes. Thank you, that's good.

Vanderscoff: Is that good? Is that reaching you? [*sound of wind impacting Miriam's lapel microphone*]

Ellis: Yes, well I think the table is kind of in the way right now. Maybe you can move the table one way or the other. That's good, that's fine. That's fine, thank you, Cameron. *C'est très bien, c'est très bien.*

Vanderscoff: Good, good. So, you were saying?

Ellis: So, I was saying, so she managed to create a really good little repertoire group. And we would learn two or three roles at the same time, which was a lot to be asking of these seventeen and eighteen-year-olds. And yet we did it. We worked our heads off for her because she inspired it. Yes, it was a lot of work, but we learned so much.

Vanderscoff: Do you have any sense why you got it, why you booked it? You know, you were a last-minute substitute. You go there. You've read your Molière on the train. In retrospect, do you have any sense of—

Ellis: Well, she seemed to have a notion that I had a kind of flair for it, I guess, whatever. And I was so fortunate to have my father around. He used to work with me very frequently. For example, I'll never forget the way he taught me to say the "eu."¹⁵ The *eu*, which is, I don't know—*tu comprends le français un peu ou non?*

Vanderscoff: *Un peu, un peu, peu, peu.* [laughs, indicates a tiny amount]

Ellis: *Un peu?*

Vanderscoff: Very little. Very, very little. [laughs]

Ellis: *Très, très peu.* Well, you know enough to know the sound "eu" is a challenge. Because generally, what happens when people are being taught the language, they are not taught how to compose the sound, which is not a great mystery. It's simply getting to know how to use your means of expression: your tongue, your lips, and your voice: where to put your tongue, where to put your lips to make the sound *eu, eu*. My father took the trouble to sit me down and teach me how to say it. That's how I can impart it to students, because he taught me the tricks.

Vanderscoff: How had your father picked up so many languages in the first place?

Ellis: I don't know. He just loved languages. If there was a language being offered at the adult school, he would have to go and look into it. He just loved to do it. And he was the kind that would write to the *New York Times* and tell them, "Oh, you used such and such an adverb

¹⁵ In English, it sounds more like "oo," but emphatic, with a quick expulsion of breath.

instead of an adjective in this article.” Or, “Your spelling was off.” He was a real pedant, just like I am. I got that gene from him, for sure—a terrible pedant.

More Family History

Vanderscoff: So, what sort of work did your parents do? We haven’t discussed that. You said that the Depression was difficult for your family and they lost their house. But what sort of work did they do?

Ellis: He was a lawyer. He was a lawyer, and he worked for the city. He wrote some rules about housing that were adopted. And he did searches, which more affluent lawyers could afford. They would hire him to search the law for them when they were working on particularly difficult cases. My father was a great researcher. He knew where to go to look for what, since that’s the initial challenge because, first of all, you’re just surrounded by oceans of books regarding the law. So where do you even begin to look to find what you need to find out?

Yes, as his second job, he did that. He was making about \$23 a week or so, for a family of what became six, because after me, there was one more child. I was the third. After my brother died, I was the fourth, but I was the third survivor. And there was one more who came along in 1933. So, we were four children and two adults. [*phone rings*] Oh, and that’s my oldest, speaking of children.

Vanderscoff: Do you want me to get the phone?

Ellis: Oh no, no. It’s all right. I’ll get it. It’s just right here.

Vanderscoff: I think your daughter got it.

Ellis: Oh Vicki, did you get it? [*pitching to speak to her daughter in the next room*] Yes, Vick, tell her that I'm busy with Cameron. Tell her I'll call her. Would you please, darling? I'll call her when we're finished.

Would you like something to drink now? Are you okay?

Vanderscoff: I'm perfectly good. Can I get you anything?

Ellis: No, no. I'm fine. I'm fine, thanks.

Vanderscoff: So yes, you were talking about your father—

Ellis: Yes, my father, yes. He was a tremendous influence on me, as I think you may have ascertained by now. First with his moral code, to the point where my brother, who became a very well-known and respected accountant, was called by a committee in Washington. Because he still lived in New York—the rest of my family pretty much stayed in the East. They had a place on Long Island—I've forgotten the name of it now—my brother did, bought a home out there. He loved nature, too, so he loved having a place where he could go and dig and plant things and grow things.

But anyway, they called him to testify in front of some committee from Congress, because he was such a respected accountant. That came from my father, straight forward from him. He used to come home and tell us stories. His clients were all very poor. They couldn't pay him in money, so they would pay him in barter of some sort, an exchange, I don't know, vegetables or something that they made, or who knows what it was.

Vanderscoff: And so, were those some of the people who were cycling through the house all the time?

Ellis: No, no. I'm talking about his clients, the actual clients that he had. No, the people cycling through the house were people that my folks knew. They were acquaintances. They were friends of acquaintances, friends or relatives of friends or whatever. Well, you know that New York is so cosmopolitan and international. You've probably had an open house, too, even though you had nothing. Nobody had anything. So, you shared your nothing with others who had nothing.

I don't know, you're awfully young, so your parents may have been too young to have lived through that era of the thirties and the forties. It took the war, of course, to bring a very large measure of greater prosperity to this country, and innovation. And the motivations changed. People started to become more acquisitive and more ambitious, and many wanted more out of life than just the very basic, rudimentary, elementary necessities.

And then, of course, we had the films of the thirties, which were almost all of them so escapist. And those big musicals, the Busby, what was his name?—those musicals where they were all lying around and making different visual patterns.¹⁶ [*laughs*] Also, the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers films. You know, pure escapism. I get a couple of them on Netflix just for *auld lang syne*, to see what the moral codes were and what the levels of expectation in life were.

¹⁶ Busby Berkeley was an American film director and choreographer renowned for geometric, prismatic, and fantastically elaborate dance routines in leading 30s films like *The Gold Diggers of 1933*.

Vanderscoff: So, for you as a young girl growing up in that world, what ideas are you starting to get about what you want to be and what you want to do?

Ellis: Oh, what ideas I was starting to get was that, well, I thought first, madly, I thought—Madame Danièl had a good friend. Odette Myrtil was her name—she was a French actress on Broadway. And Madame Danièl wanted to take me to meet her, to see if maybe she could give me an idea as to whether I should try. Because I didn't have the raw material. I was a short, scrunchy-looking nothing. I didn't have any specific—I had a talent for humor, supposedly, a comic talent. That's what Madame told me all the time, "*C'est pour la comédie, Miriam, il faut, il faut que vous fassiez de la comédie,*" "You have to do comedy." She thought I had a gift for comedy.

And later, when I did little theater—I did a lot of little theater when I was already married, with a family and all the responsibilities. Because we lived in the Valley,¹⁷ and there were great opportunities to do theater—not professional, just amateur. So, I did a lot of theater. I did theater when I was doing my master's at San Fernando Valley State. Now it's a university; then it was just a college, but it was a state college. I did theater there, and I did some productions with a local group, the Toluca Lake players. That was the one time that Vicki was quite lost—because the kids always used to come to see me perform. And that was when Vicki was the most confused, because I was playing a black woman. In those days Toluca Lake was [*affecting a posh English accent*] a very, very white and very, very rich area, so there were

¹⁷ In reference to Southern California's San Fernando Valley.

no black women in their little theater group, believe me. It's shameful, but those women were cleaning their fancy houses, but that was all.

So, the group was doing *You Can't Take It with You*. We had this Hollywood director who was directing it. So, he cast me as Rheba. [*affecting an African American accent*] I played Rheba, a black lady. That was one of the more challenging roles that I played, maybe the most challenging one, when I was acting in English.

I had some pretty challenging ones acting in French. But the most difficult one, when I was acting in English, I think, was the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. I played that character who has to run the gamut of being a kind of bawdy flirt when it begins—quite low-class humor—until she discovers the corpse of her beloved ersatz daughter. She has really raised Juliet as her own. And she discovers her dead “child.” It takes a tremendous change in interpretation, in emotional exercise. It's a matter of becoming very engrossed in the emotion, up to the point where you cannot lose control, but on the other hand, you have to be realistic enough to convince the audience that you are actually undergoing that searing pain.

So that's a demanding role, the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. That was a challenging one for me to conquer. And especially when just coming, a few minutes before that, from trying to incite laughter in the audience, and now it's quite the obverse. You have really very little time to make that transformation within yourself, time—I mean real time.

Vanderscoff: So, as we move through these sessions, we'll check back in; we'll loop back into some of those roles. So just for now, I think we've covered a lot of bases about your childhood. One person we haven't mentioned is your mother.

Ellis: Oh, my mother. I was very, very close with my mother. I used to call her “The Alderman,” because she could go out in the street and she would know everyone, and everyone would know her. She would stop and say, “Oh hello, Sylvia. How’s your daughter? Has she finished her course in” whatever? And she would chat with Sylvia. And then she would meet someone else and chat, know that one and the history and the children. She knew everyone and—

Oops, I’m sorry. I’m wrecking this entire enterprise with my big feet. [*seeing that she had stepped on the microphone wire running from her lapel to the recorder*]

Vanderscoff: No, it’s perfectly fine.

Ellis: Is it?

Vanderscoff: Oh, yes. It’s totally—

Ellis: Okay, good. Sorry; luckily, I didn’t wreck it.

Vanderscoff: Oh, no. So please, go on. You were saying, your mother, the alderman.

Ellis: Yes, my mother, the alderman. So that’s what I said, “Why don’t you run for office?” Well, actually, she became president of her woman’s group and so forth. And she had quite the gift of gab, I must say, yes. That’s a picture of her right up there, if you can see the woman with the corsage.

Vanderscoff: Over here? [*looking among the photographs on the shelves*]

Ellis: Yes, up, left, center. There, yes. That's her eightieth birthday. They made a big wingding for her. Yes, that's my mother.

Yes, I didn't mention my mother, because of both my parents, she was not the one with the book learning. But she had amazing perception of "the other." And a deep-founded—I believe it was not artificial, by any means—I believe it was deep-rooted and deep-founded and absolutely sincere—an interest in the lives of other people. And again, like my father, wanting to help. Perhaps I'm being a bit too rosy here, and maybe exaggerating to some extent. But that was my perception of my parents, as being other-oriented and interested in what they could do to help other people.

Vanderscoff: Now, you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation today that during the war you had a building sense that you wanted to do more to help. So, I wonder if we could return to that feeling.

Ellis: Yes. Well, with my brother going on all those desperately dangerous—you know, in those days, before we were actually engaged officially in the war, we used to have these convoys where we would be sending goods, material, matériel to the Allies, particularly to the English. So that's why the merchant marine was so essential, so absolutely essential. For many years, they would go without escort. They had no naval escort. Finally, finally, when things got desperately serious and horribly dangerous, they started to escort, to some degree, these camp convoys.

When my brother came home on leave between trips, we used to wash and iron his uniforms. I would iron his uniform. And every time, Cameron, that we had to say goodbye to him, I can't

tell you— I was very close with my brother because, of the four of us—my oldest sister was nine years older; it was a big difference—he was only five years older than I, so within vision, within grasp. He used to take me with him all over. He had his pet name for me. He taught me how to throw a football pass, a spiral pass so that the ball would go like this— [*indicates, laughs*] you know, the kid sister. We would rent a tandem bike. I would sit in the back, and he would do all the main peddling, and we would go on long bike rides together. I remember that as a very, very wonderful memory.

And because we were too poor, we did not have an apartment with any cooling in the hot summers. We used to go to the movies of a Saturday, my brother and I. And he was under twelve, which was the breakoff age where you had to pay more money. I think instead of a dime, I think it became fifteen cents or something. So, for a long time, he was under twelve—and then suddenly, he got tall. So, we couldn't fool anymore and say he was under twelve, yes. [*laughs*] I remember that.

Vanderscoff: So, you kept that sense of attachment with him as you both grew older, and then when he was in the merchant marine.

Ellis: Oh, yes. We were very, very close, from the time that I can remember, up until the time that he passed away, which is now five years ago. In his later years he lived in Texas, and we would Skype several times a week and keep in touch that way.

And he still remembered—as poor as we were, my mother was extravagant to the point where she signed us up for an opera recording, I think it was per month. It was like a *Time Life* kind of thing. You'd subscribe and they would send you a recording of an entire opera

every month for, I don't know, two dollars, or whatever it cost. It was a lot of money, but we did it. So, my brother and I learned, for example—before he passed away, he still remembered the final duet from *Carmen* and would recite it to me on Skype. He would go, "*Carmen, il est temps encore, oui, il est temps encore, ô, ma Carmen, laisse-moi te sauver et me sauver avec toi!*" And the horrible, sad irony of his life was that he couldn't carry a tune in a laundry hamper. Had no ear whatsoever, but desperately loved music and loved opera and tried to sing these roles, and would that drive me up the wall! I would be screaming, "Oh please, shut up! Shut up! Just say the words." [laughs]

Vanderscoff: So, you have all of these areas of connection. And then, when he's overseas, you're at home. I wonder what your memories of the home front experience were, whether there was rationing—

Ellis: Oh, of course. There was very, very severe rationing, very strict. Except for people, of course—whom I did not know—there were, supposedly, people who were cheating on the black market and finding ways to stretch their food stamps. There were stamps; you got stamps, and the stamps entitled you to X quantity of Y product, whatever it was, whether it was sugar, or meat, or fat, or whatever. There were some things that were in very, very low supply, and they were strictly rationed.

Yes, the home front. We learned. But as I told you before, having been through the Depression, where we did with so little, you just make it a way of life. And then, I went to work in the displaced person camps, where we used to get a bucket per person of water per day, one bucket per day. So, if there were two of us, we got two buckets of water for cooking, cleaning, washing, for whatever you needed water. So, to this day, I have a bucket in the sink,

in the kitchen, because I water my plants with the water from the kitchen sink. I do not throw it away. Talk about inscribed, right?

There's a wonderful line from a play from the Middle Ages, a version of *Antigone*, where her lover, Hémon—I guess he's Haemon in English; I don't even know his name in English—but he talks about his love for her. And he says, "*Et moi, j'ai Antigone cousue dans mes entrailles,*" "And I, I have Antigone sewn into my guts," which is such a magnificent metaphor for feeling about someone as a part of you, right? I love to quote that. Visually, it's a marvelous metaphor, and also emotionally, right, and quite unexpected, poetically. And so, some things that happened to you when you were a child or young enough for them to make a big difference, they stay with you your entire life. There we are. And that's how I feel about water. I cannot bear the wasting of water. When I see people just put their faucet on to let the water get warm or you know, just let it run down the drain—oh, it drives me crazy, really, waste like that.

Vanderscoff: So, would you mind connecting the dots, then, from being in the French language and theater program, to then actually wanting to go and going [*crosstalk*]—

Working in the Displaced Persons Camps, Post World War II

Ellis: Oh yes, so what happened with that adventure was—so when I was twenty-one, I got on a ship. It was actually the *Queen Elizabeth*, on one of her early runs. I went second class with a group of friends. We were sent by this charitable organization to work with DPs, displaced persons, which meant any survivor or any would-be immigrant who wanted to try and pick up the shards of their lives and maybe make a new life for themselves somewhere

better for them. In '48 I went and stayed in France, '48 and '49. There, I met my first husband, whose picture's up there with the children. He had been in the RAF, and he was working in the camps.

A good number of the people that we cared for were refugees from North Africa, where they had also been occupied. They had various illnesses which are pretty unknown in the West, aside from some of them where you lose your sight—I want to say trachoma. It's related to trachoma—I don't know. You lose the sight of your eyes, one eye or the other.¹⁸ And these were wretchedly poor people who had lived pretty much in the desert areas—you know, the North African countries, they were possessions of France. So, if you were from Algiers, Algeria—Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, what am I leaving out? I said Morocco, yes, I think so—

Vanderscoff: Libya. Egypt would have been English.¹⁹

Ellis: Egypt, and Syria, too. Those were people who came to the camps where I was working. I worked in two different camps. The first one was attached to, in Marseilles, to the *Hôpital anglais*. For them and for the place and for the resources, it had been built pretty much with English funding, and so it was called *L'Hôpital anglais*, the English Hospital.

Edward, my first husband, had come because he had been in the RAF. He was—speak about traumas—he was one of two men left in his squadron. A squadron is quite a large group of [sighs] cannon fodder, and he was one of only two left. When I met him, he was suffering a lot of, what is it called now? The acronym for it, right?

¹⁸ Trachoma is indeed an infectious disease that can lead to blindness.

¹⁹ By World War II Egypt was politically independent, but still was occupied with British troops.

Vanderscoff: PTSD.

Ellis: PTSD, yes. A lot of that. So, he had known someone who became a colonel in the Israeli Air Force, or nascent air force. Israel had recently been created, I believe it was in the forties, if I'm not mistaken—

Vanderscoff: '48, I think, is the beginning of—

Ellis: '48, yes. And here we were, '48, '49, we were really right at the beginning. And so, Edward was thinking perhaps of joining and using his expertise, because he was a mechanic—on the planes. So, he came to offer his expertise. And I became, more or less, myself and several of my friends with whom I was traveling, we became drafted to work. And I, because I had a knowledge of French, they took me right away and put me in charge of various tasks.

My first job in the camps, if you're interested, was—well, maybe I should say my second job. My first job was, this woman, a nurse, put a syringe into my hand—didn't inject me with it, she put it into my hand. She said, "Here, you're going to be a nurse." Because here I was, healthy, young, I knew the language. But most of all, I knew that mostly unknown language, English. And everything, all the supplies that came through, especially for my next job, after being a nurse, was that I became a *magasinière*, which meant I was in charge of all the foods, the one who had to procure the fresh as well as the donated-from-America food, and then dispense it. This was a large hospital; it had 200 or 300 patients in it. And so, to portion out, to make all the portions—say I had a big sack of something, I had to count out the portions. Or if I had a package or a pallet of merchandise delivered? You know, like on planks, a

delivery of all of these cans? Nobody knew, what did “cut string beans” mean? and how do you use them? How are they supposed to know? They haven’t met a string bean in their lives, most of them. I was the one who could decipher all the foodstuffs and figure out how to use them.

So, I became the *magasinière*, and also, at the same time, I was doing my *piqûres*—*piqûres* were the shots. Oh, I gave a lot of easy shots, vitamin shots. Because these people were in such a bad state of health—especially the children, Cameron. They were so heartbreaking, the children, these little things who were so underdeveloped. You know, an American child of maybe, I don’t know, eight months or a year would have been this size, [*indicates with her hands the size of a big, healthy baby*] and these were supposed to be perhaps two-year-olds. Their diet had been so terrible, so terrible. They lived mostly on bread and whatever else they could find, hot peppers or whatever they could find to go with the bread. They were so emaciated. And they were so underdeveloped, not only physically, but emotionally and mentally as well.

Then the third thing I did, besides taking care of the food supplies and the nursing side of things, was that we started little classes for the kids, trying to just teach them little bits of, whatever bits of French songs, a little bit of math—whatever we could teach them. None of us had been trained to be teachers. But these were volunteers who—and the word “*volonté*,” upon which the word “volunteers” is based, come to think of it—I hadn’t thought of that before. But *volonté* means “will,” your will, your desire, your goodwill, your wanting to help, *volonté*. If someone says, “Would you like to do this?” you’ll say, “Oh, *avec volonté*,” “willingly, willingly.” So that’s a volunteer. It’s willing, willing to help.

And seeing as I've already expounded somewhat maybe hyperbolically to you [*laughs*] about my father and mother with their urge to give, I guess it's not unusual that I fell in with a group of like-minded people, wanting to give. We got some remuneration, certain little bits of payment we got for working in the camps. But it was hardly, shall we say, a fortune.

Vanderscoff: So, did you sign up for a period of time? Or what was the nature of the agreement you had?

Ellis: Yeah, the nature of it was that I would try it for two years. I would go for two years. Yeah, I would spend two years, so that's why I was there in '48 and '49. And then in '50, we came home. Well, "home," that is to say, I came back to the States, and Edward came with me, as my husband, to what was to be his new "home." They were starting to bring MG's and Austins and little British cars to the US and they needed people to work on them. And so, he said, "Oh yes, that would be wonderful." But he was very worried about all the guns. He was so sure that every gas station or every business in America gets held up, doesn't it? You know, those were the myths that were—

Oh, I left out a chunk where I once worked for an import-export house.

Vanderscoff: In France?

Ellis: No, no, in New York. After I finished high school, I took a little turn at college. But I didn't like it. It was too much. I had gone to the high school located across the road, thank you. It was too much of the same thing going on. So, I took a class—

Vanderscoff: I'm just wondering if I could pause you there for a second. So, given that ultimately, of course, you go back to school all the way through your PhD and you become a college teacher, what do you think happened or didn't happen for you in your own first experience with college?

Ellis: Yeah. Well, as I said, I started; I tried college, but I didn't like it. It was almost, it seemed so much the same as I had finished recently—in high school. It didn't seem to me—it didn't interest or inspire me at all.

And so instead of academia, I went to business classes and became—of all the most banal and unexciting things—I became a speedwriting secretary. I don't know if you know speedwriting. Speedwriting is the essence of texting today. You basically drop the vowels and work from a consonantal base.

Vanderscoff: Like writing in shorthand?

Ellis: In shorthand. But you use the alphabet, the American alphabet, the English alphabet. And there are certain symbols that you learn, but there are very few of them. It isn't like Gregg or Pitman shorthand, which was all symbols and just—very much like when I started UNIX and had to learn all the symbology of that, which meant nothing, and you could hang it on nothing. It was not the kind of thing that derived rationally from a basis.

So instead of that, I went to this new-fangled speedwriting, because my sister had done it. And she became so good at it that she could do 140 words a minute, which is about the speed that a genuinely gifted speaker, thinker, spinker—"spinker," [laughs] there's "speaker" and "thinker" for you together.

Vanderscoff: A portmanteau.

Ellis: [*laughs*] You have to be able to think fast enough to be able to speak fast enough, right? Okay, most people speak about 120. That's about the average. So, when you get to 140, you're really going at a rapid rate.

So, the beauty of knowing speedwriting is that I did it when I studied Russian, for instance—or you can do it with any language, because you're going by the sounds more than by the spelling. You know, it's not a matter of the spelling but of the phonetics.

So, I went and did this course. It took me about six or eight weeks. And then I started to work, because I needed to save money. I wanted to save money so that I could pay for my adventures, because I knew I wanted to get going with my life. Maybe when I was twenty I started, until I was twenty-one, I was working. So, I saved up enough money. They actually, at one point, they paid me \$100 a week. Now that was *mucho dinero*, let me tell you, my friend. Well, that was because I not only was doing all of the correspondence; I was also translating for them when they got foreign correspondence.

Vanderscoff: French-English.

Ellis: From French to English I was, yes, translating. And also, Spanish, Spanish as well.

Vanderscoff: Oh, so by this time you had already picked up some Spanish.

Ellis: Yes, I'd already taken Spanish, too. And we started, this firm that I worked for, which was Commodity International Company, was made up of two vets, ex-army pals who were very bright. They decided that exporting American goods to the absolutely voracious Europe,

which wanted to be rebuilt, which needed to be rebuilt—and they could make their fortune doing that. You know, things like tires and reinforcing rods for building, for construction, and cement and lumber, and oh, you name it. They just started dabbling in all sorts of things. Yes, so I worked for them I think, probably about a year and a half, or so, close to that, saving up my money. Since I still lived at home, I gave my mother some money to help them a little bit. Had it not been for that secretarial job, I could never have afforded my travel to Europe and all that ensued from that many-faceted experience.

Vanderscoff: What sort of expectations would you say your parents had for you?

Ellis: They wanted us all to be happy and healthy, of course. I don't know what they had in mind. My mother was absolutely delighted with Edward when he came. He was very charming. He was an engrossing conversationalist. He loved to speak. My son has got that gene. There's no question. Between me and my husband, I guess he got the speaking gene. He'll talk the leg right off that little table. *[laughs]* Yes, Jonathan is—and Vicki as well. Well, Vicki, for a long time, was very quiet. But when she started to speak, she can be quite voluble when she wants to be. And then my oldest child, as well, Debra, she's the nurse. I think that's what my mother certainly wanted, was for us to have a family and to be happy. And they loved Edward very much. He was very warm. He fit right in with the family. They took him in as one of their own, very nicely.

Vanderscoff: So, looking back, do you think your parents had any particular expectations regarding whether you with education, or regarding you professionally, or regarding whether you'd have a family, or any of that?

Ellis: I don't know. Yes, I think the family part is what—yes, I think that's certainly what my mother wanted and probably my father as well. Although they never really—we didn't talk about things like that. We talked more about day-to-day survival and, you know, things of real, immediate need, rather than dreams. But they inspired me in so many ways that now, when I try and even make them tangible and identify them— I think it was, most certainly my father who was a model of curiosity about learning and about knowing, and about understanding and about communicating and about sharing. With my mother, it was more on the emotive side. And of course, they both loved music very much.

Vanderscoff: What kind of music?

Ellis: Oh, classical music and, of course, opera. We had that in the house always. We always had opera going in the house. And my brother inherited—remember I told you how he desperately wanted to be a singer and couldn't sing? My father was another frustrated singer. He would love to sing. But alas, the voice was not that pleasant. [*laughs*] But there we were. We didn't tell him that, right?

Now, Vicki has a beautiful voice. And my sister also had a beautiful voice. So somewhere it skipped a little bit. I even took singing lessons, vocal coaching for a while. But that was at the same time—what happened was Dad had, one of his clients was a vocal coach, a singing teacher, an Italiano who was five feet tall, Professor Loforezi. He was about five feet tall, and he had a deep *basso profundo* voice. So, it was incongruous, [*pitching her voice rumbling and deep*] this big voice coming out of [*pitching her voice teeny and high*] this little guy. So, he couldn't make it professionally. So, he became a vocal coach. That's what happens: if you can,

you do, and if you can't, you teach. Remember that one? [*laughs*] That falls a little close to the quarry—I don't like where that rock falls. Anyway, so—

Vanderscoff: Well, we've gone about eighty minutes. It might be a good time for us to stop.

Ellis: Have we? Oh, come on, Miriam, ça suffit! I told you.

Vanderscoff: No, we're fine. It's very good. Just a final question from me. I just wonder what you think—you said that you really wanted to go over to France to help, you know, to help a humanitarian crisis. I wonder what the impact of that experience was, and of seeing—

Ellis: Well, I'll tell you one thing. Working with the North Africans, I certainly discovered something about the difference in the level of cultural development, in the level of morality that existed among these desperately poor, poor people from different elements of what had been almost all the Francophone cultures. There is a difference between the Moroccans and the Algerians and the Tunisians, and especially the Syrians. The Syrians were very, very rapacious when it came to things, you know, holding onto little— We would have rations, and we would give them perhaps new pajamas, because these were patients. They were supposedly in bed most of the time. And some of them would wear the pajamas all the time, as their day-to-day clothing. Others put the pajamas away, perhaps, for a rainy day, or for when they would need to sell them, or who knows what.

Yes, there were certainly cultural differences that I had to learn. Working with each of the groups, primarily what irritated me terribly was the fact that the women were treated as such nonhumans by the males in these cultures. The women did literally all of the work. The men would sit in groups together and they would play. They had different games, card games

and other games. They would sit on their haunches, most of them, when they weren't getting treatments. And the women would be doing all of the laundry, the cleaning, you name it, the cooking, everything in the camp.

One day, I got into a lot of trouble. I went over to the males. And I said, well, "*Voulez-vous aller aider un peu,*" would you please go and help a bit? You know, they need some help. They would not lower themselves to do that, to go and help the females. That's women's work. So, I misspoke, unbeknowing—I soon found out, "Shut up." Yes, two words that should guide me probably a little bit more. [*laughs*]

Vanderscoff: Well, this is actually, well, on the contrary, this is all about—

Ellis: *Ça suffit, Miriam!*

Vanderscoff: —speaking and sharing your stories. So, you're coming into contact with these other cultures. And you're seeing some things about the cultures that disturb you. Were there other sides of the cultures that were—

Ellis: Oh, some of them were very—

Vanderscoff: —edifying or interesting [*crosstalk*]? What's the mix?

Ellis: Yes, they were very charming. Their music was very attractive, and their dances, their movements, their innate movements—their dance movements, and just innately some of them were very graceful or just very well-coordinated. I don't know what it was, if it was cultural or just individual, or whatever—

Vanderscoff: So, by music, you mean when people would be singing songs or something?

Ellis: Yes, they would be singing. A lot of the time, the men would be sitting around, playing whatever games they were playing, and humming snatches of melody, would be interspersed with some melodies. And there were occasions when there were happy celebrations and they danced, or they manifested in their music their pleasure. So that was nice.

But we also had all these other cultures in the camps, yeah, all mixed together. People got along pretty well. There were not too many fights and so forth. The idea of the camp was that the commandant in charge of it—of the one that I'm thinking of that I was in, second— At first, as I said, I was in the one at the hospital, and that was more rigidly administered, more bureaucratically administered. And then I was in the second one, which was at the home of someone—some generous philanthropist had given his and her villa, which was right adjacent to the Mediterranean. There was a little road between the property of the villa and the Mediterranean over there, across the road as it were. It was quite a magnificent spot.

I was in this little town called Bandol, where they had one casino, and the rest of the town subsisted on fishing. They were fishing for *poulpe*, which is octopus. And the way they fished for them was they would go out at night in boats, in little boats with lanterns, because the light attracted the octopus. The octopus would come right up to the light. And then they would, whatever they captured them with. I don't know—I never wanted to know that.

Then it started to be more touristy after the war, as things became a little less crazy. But primarily, it was there just for the casino, which was definitely a part of the culture in that part of France, in the southern whole area there. You know about Monte Carlo, of course, and the fact that casinos were the principal form of income for many of these little towns.

I went back to Bandol later with my second husband, because we made several trips to France together. Because I divorced Edward, and when I came up here in 1971, I came up here to Santa Cruz and I met Paul, who eventually became my second husband and a great love of my life. I lost him to illness, five years ago now. It was a great, great blow, over which I will never get, I think.

Vanderscoff: Well, I'd love to hear some stories about him as we go. You mentioned that one thing you did together is you went back to that—

Ellis: We went back to Bandol, yes. We went on this just very quick trip in the area. I didn't go into the town itself, but I had heard from others how much it had changed. It had become a big tourist town because of its location and its beauty. But they had built these grotesque edifices, hotels right on the shoreline through that whole area and changed it so much. There was no control over the style of building, or the size, or the impact. There was no planning. That was a great *déception*, a great disappointment.

Well, you know how they say: you can't go home again. And it's very true in so many ways, because what is home? Is it not something that you carry with you, that you have invented for yourself in many ways? And so, you have changed. And the world has changed. You can't expect stasis in that kind of situation. Although we feel terribly, terribly kind of cheated in a sense, because when you think of home, it's something that you have this feeling of connection that you think would never, ever become frayed or loosened or weakened. But *ce n'est pas vrai*, change is the essence of life, after all. Or should be, in order to really be enjoying, in the word, in its meaning, having a worth, meaning of life.

Vanderscoff: I think that's a beautiful place to close. One final question is, given your ultimate work with language, I wonder if you drew any lessons from the camps, seeing so many different cultures there—if you drew any lessons about the nature or the power of language and language work?

Ellis: Well, a lot of the people with whom I was interacting did not even have the basics of French to communicate. They spoke Arabic, the ones from North Africa, for the most part. Or even then they might be speaking a dialect, or they might even be speaking some kind of French dialect, a patois, what they call a patois, which has some roots in the original. And then it becomes just like the Creoles, for example, who have words that might have a reminiscent echo of French in some of their structures, but they're very far removed. It's a whole other means of communicating, which you have to learn—a whole vocabulary and pronunciation and everything else.

Yes. And now, of course, with all of the electronic world that we live in, English has become what French once was: very much the universal tongue. And, of course, it depends what level of English we're discussing, too. Americans think when they go abroad, "Oh well, everybody speaks English." That is so not the case, or was formerly so not the case. So many times, on my trips abroad, I've been thrust into the role of instant interpreter willy-nilly. *[laughs]* I'm happy to do it. Or even if I have had adventures where I've gone, let's say, to a hospital to visit someone I know, or what have you, and ending up there having to translate for someone who didn't know enough English.

Vanderscoff: But then you're saying that working in the camps, it was a place where there were just so many languages going on.

Ellis: Oh, yes. There was a lot going on. It was difficult sometimes. There were fights because of misunderstandings or misconceptions or frustrations, as you can imagine.

Vanderscoff: Did you draw any lessons about how to communicate, about communication?

Ellis: More with, I would say now, there would be more of a theater kind of approach, more with an action, a direct action. Perhaps just take that person's hand. Or express some kind of a tactile relationship, an immediate and sincere and meaningful and warm expression that is more—let's say it's more animalistic, perhaps. Because we do have that element in us, do we not? I mean, well, a lot of explorers have found this, that if they come upon a completely alien group of people, if they approach them in body language with the idea of opening oneself up, of making oneself perhaps vulnerable to this person—and at the mercy, throwing yourself upon the quote, "better side" of this person. There has to be a universal understanding somewhere among us. There has to be. There is. You just have to be open enough to let it show, to let it hang out there.

It depends what situation you're in and how genuine a person you are, and how much you can convey of what you feel. Not everyone is open enough and not every culture prepares you to be open enough or self-revelatory enough. I mean, you can't really do that in New York, can you? You can't go on the subway and just do that "Hello, brother" kind of act. That's not going to work too well. You have to know where you are, with whom you're dealing, what are the circumstances, what are the expectations, how will this be received. So of course, it really depends very much on the situation.

I'm just trying to make a very, probably not pragmatic or doable suggestion. But very often, that was the case. And it would depend upon the people involved, of course, on the characters involved. If you had some big macho with a knife in his hand who was a little bit off his rocker, that would be a very different situation. But luckily, we did pretty well, especially at the villa, more than at the hospital.

At the hospital, we still had these people who were desperately worried about their health. A lot of them were very sick. Yeah, I was working with people who had TB, besides all the *maladies*, all the sicknesses I was telling you about, about which we didn't even know the names, what caused them. We thought it had to do with the climate and the sand that these people constantly had around them that brought their own kinds of recondite illnesses that were unknown in the West.

And by the way, this was just about the time when penicillin was being introduced, just about the first antibiotic. Imagine what a miraculous thing that was for them.

Vanderscoff: Did you use penicillin?

Ellis: I don't know if the doctors did have their—there may have been one or two who were brave enough to try it, because it was a big, radical step. So, there may have been.

All right, so that was my little adventure abroad. Then I came home. You asked me about customs. At one point, there was some kind of celebration—I don't remember what it was anymore—among the North Africans. We used to call them the "NAs," the North Africans. They had gotten something and slaughtered it. I don't know if it was a rabbit or what. They had the blood on some kind of an implement. And they came over to me, "Oh, Madame

Miriam,” and they smeared it. They took some blood and smeared it on my forehead for fertility. Wasn’t that nice of them? Then I had three kids in five years. So, I guess it worked. [laughter] See? Ask a lady questions.

Vanderscoff: So that takes us to more than an hour and a half. I think this is a good place to pause for the day.

Ellis: Let’s pause, absolutely! Now that I gave you the secret to my fecundity. It was that bit of blood. [laughter] Oh yeah, and then they had done something to a sheep’s head, and they offered it to me to eat some of it. I did say “no” in a very charming, affable way. I said, “Oh, maybe tomorrow” or some such thing. Yes, they did come up sometimes with these goodies to share with me.

Vanderscoff: It may have been a meaningful—

Ellis: Oh, it was very meaningful, very! No, no, it’s a great sign of affection. And, I also refused their help. The women were so used to always taking care of and waiting on and doing all the work for others. I kept on trying to reject them taking such care of me, you know, like servants, like slaves. It was terrible. I couldn’t bear it, to have someone want to do everything for me. I kept on, “*Oh, non, non, merci, merci.*” The women were held—I mean, I can see now when they talk about the difference in Afghanistan and what’s happened to the females.

Vanderscoff: Do you think you ever had a significant communication experience one-to-one with one of these women that you’re talking about?

Ellis: Well, I used to give them little, not quite lectures. I used to tell them little things, like, “You’re strong. You have a lot of strength. You are a fine person. You are an important person and just look at these children, how they depend on you, and what wonderful work you do for them.” I did my best to really, to massage their non-existent egos and to try and tell them that they were worth something in this world.

Vanderscoff: What do you think you learned from them?

Ellis: I learned what women were treated like in these other cultures. I saw it, as I’ve tried to explain to you. I saw it enough. I didn’t have to be told; it was just really right there, right there. I mean, the fact of them even learning how to write their name or read, you know, the most rudimentary anything. I used to try and teach them little things, to say, “*Je suis*,” “I am so and so,” “I am this,” “I am this.” “I know how to do this,” you know, to look at the plus, to see the side of their existence that was at least noteworthy and worthy and helpful and positive and generous and good. I tried that. But you’re going against, what, thousands of years of slavery? I can see when they talk about that, how the Taliban will have the women back being where they were again: in the sewer, right in the lowest echelons. Oh yeah, I know it.

I had that big streak of being a feminist, I guess. We didn’t have names for those things. I just thought of myself always as a person. I always thought that I was a human being, just like you others did, the ones with the beards—you know, what do you call them? Oh, yeah: the males. Oh, those! That was a big mistake. What kind of a horrendous, rebellious thing is that, right? The nerve.

Vanderscoff: And in future sessions, I'd like to pick that thread up a lot and talk about that through your work here.

Ellis: Talk about the things that I've done at UC? Yeah, I think we've—

Vanderscoff: Yeah, this is just the beginning.

Ellis: I think we have to get to UC sometime.

Vanderscoff: Oh, we will. Next time, we will.

Hosting Eugene Ionesco at UCSC

Ellis: Will be—yes, after '19 comes '20—it will be forty-nine years. I came in '71 to UC. And *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, you know that play? Perfect, that's me. Just call me Sheridan.²⁰ [laughs] I came to do my doctorate at this place. I finished my doctorate in the lit department—it was called the lit board. It wasn't called a department yet. In the seventies, it was called the lit board.

That program was called *La littérature vivante*, Living Literature.²¹ It was in French, and the idea was, instead of just teaching about dead white men, we're going to be teaching about alive men and alive women. And so, we brought a group of—might I say “living,” yes, [laughs]—authors to the campus. Among them was Ionesco. And here's Miriam, working madly to finish her dissertation, which was due in the month of May. And here it is May and they tell me, “Miriam, Ionesco's coming with his wife. They have no English. We need you.

²⁰ Sheridan Whiteside is the titular role in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

²¹ A program at UCSC around the late 70s.

You're going to be their guide. You're going to drive them around. You're their chauffeur. And you're going to be their interpreter for one month." And I said, "But my thesis is due on," whatever it was, May 25 or—I don't even remember. "Oh, we'll get you an extension." Which they almost never give, but they did—they gave me an extension.

My wonderful Paul sat there and he typed that entire thing, which you saw.²² It's big, isn't it? 700 pages, or whatever the text is. You saw it. He typed it. He knew no Spanish. He knew "gracias," I think. That was his Spanish. He was a marvelous typist, though. He was a really much better typist than I ever was. And what's more, he was reliable. He said he would do it; you knew they'll do it. So, he typed that endless thing for me. Otherwise, I would never have—finished it. I think I gave it in when the Ionescos left. They left the end of May, or June 1 or something, and I gave my thesis. Or I think—no, in fact, they went with me! I remember, that's right—I just flashed on that memory! They went with me to deliver the thesis by hand to the office. I remember that. Because after that, we went to have *dîner*; we went to have dinner to celebrate.

They were so sweet. They became dear friends of mine. Well, you can just imagine, in one month, taking this absolute cosmopolitan Parisian couple from the taxi cabs and traffic and madness of Paris, and sticking them at Merrill College in a little apartment behind—you know where the apartments are, the guest apartments at Merrill? They're behind where the classrooms are. They're up there on the hill. There's the parking lot, and the parking lot goes up a hill. That's where these little guest apartments—that's where they stuck them.

²² I reviewed Miriam Ellis's dissertation in hard copy at the McHenry Library in preparation for our sessions—
Cameron Vanderscoff.

So, Ionesco is sitting there. And his wife was called Rodica. We hit it off immediately, because she was about exactly my height. So, we looked each other in the eyes, and that was it. [laughs] And he was completely *dans la lune*, on the moon. He lived in his own other world. When they got in the car every morning, I would say, “*Ah, bonjour, maître*,” “Hello, *Maître*”—*maître* is what, “maestro.” Maestro is “*maître*” We don’t have “master” in English, but *maître*, maestro. I would say, “Oh, good morning, Maestro.” And I would ask, “*Quelle est la crise du jour?*” “What’s today’s crisis?” You know like you’ll ask, “What’s today’s soup?” when you go to a restaurant. With him, there was always a crisis. “*Oh, en Afrique, une nouvelle guerre!*” “Oh, a new war in Africa!” He always had one to fit the bill, believe me. That was him, or that was he: worried about the world, the world on his shoulders all the time.

And so, one evening, it was about 6:00 or 6:30 in the evening. My phone rings. “Hello?” “I’m the fire chief from campus. And I was given your phone number because I can’t talk to these folks over here. They had the smoke alarm go off in their apartment.” Rodica— [in response to Vanderscoff miming smoking] no, not from smoking—she was making him steak. So, in order to really make a decent steak, you have to first, we used to call it seasoning it; you have to first brown it, you know, so that the smoke comes out, so that it’s ready to either accept the cooking or, I don’t know, open the pores or whatever it does. So, it made a bunch of smoke, set off the smoke alarm in the apartment, set off the sprinklers.

So Eugène was sitting at the table, munching away on his steak. There’s water coming down all over him in the kitchen. He was a little baffled, to say the least. And the alarm rang, I guess, for the fire engines to know about it. So, they came running over there, couldn’t talk to him. There he is, sitting there, eating his steak with the sprinklers. And so, the fireman called me,

and I came rushing up. I said to Rodica, “*Ah, vous voulez vraiment me donner une crise,*” “You really want to give me a heart attack, don’t you?” You know, to all of a sudden have to come running up a hill like this.

So that was one little adventure. I had a lot of adventures with them, all kinds of fun things, Cameron. *[laughs]*

Vanderscoff: Well, that’s fabulous, I think. And we’ll get all into that.

Ellis: Yes. In retrospect, that month was incredible, yes. I’ll have to tell you. The worst person in the world they could have chosen to be their guide was the person who gets lost going from here to the corner, in my car. *[laughs]* Never mind, but that’s another story for another day.

Vanderscoff: Yes, and we’ll pick up another day. Your daughter’s here with us.

Ellis: Oh, Vick.

Vicki: Hi.

Ellis: Hi, Honey.

Coming back to the United States: Life in the 1950s and 1960s

[Same layout as previous session. When the tape turns on, Miriam has already started discussing her close colleague Tom Lehrer’s philosophy and style of teaching.]

Ellis: I just want to “talk,” unquote, and that’s it. And it is quite sufficient to hear him, by the way, go on and on. He is an unstoppable, ever-yielding source of great anecdotes and

reminiscences and bits and pieces of very clever, witty, and *à propos* observations about life. So, it's been one of my distinct joys and pleasures to have known him and be able to work with him for many years, because of his being associated with UC, which, however, has never even recognized him to any extent officially. You know, the whole world has *aficionados* of Tom Lehrer, people who are great fans of his—

Vanderscoff: Yes, of course.

Ellis: —and even people of your generation and younger than you are now, from what I understand—it seems that he is re-discovered by every generation that comes along, for some reason.

And this young fellow who learned the table—what is it called, the element table²³—who's a very big star, a British fellow. I think he played in, what was that great series? Those books that were so popular, with the kid who did the magic?

Vanderscoff: *The Harry Potter.*

Ellis: *Harry Potter, yes.*

Vanderscoff: You're thinking of maybe Daniel Radcliffe.

Ellis: That's the one, Radcliffe, yes. He's a huge fan of Tom's and memorized the elemental table, which he said he learned during breaks on the show or something like that. It's very impressive about the way he became addicted to that piece.

²³ In reference to Tom Lehrer's well known song, "The Elements."

Vanderscoff: Yes, and as we go through, I think we'll circle back to Tom Lehrer a couple of times. I just wonder if today—and I should just say for the record that it's Friday, September the 27th [2019], and this is Cameron Vanderscoff here with Miriam Ellis for the second part of her oral history project in Santa Cruz, California. But to start us off, I was wondering if we could pick up where we left off yesterday— we were in the south of France. You were working in displaced person camps.

Ellis: Oh God, I thought we got way past that.

Vanderscoff: Well, so could we just pick up with your decision to come back to the United States and where you went then?

Ellis: Definitely yes, that was a very important decision that we made, that it was time to come home. And we did that, because Edward wanted to make the US his home, too. So that was a very new chapter in both of our lives, to say the least.

And eventually we moved to California from the East, at the behest—actually, the great prodding—of my grandmother, who thought it would be a much happier environment for both of us, and a new place to start a new life. And so that's what we did. We came to California in 1955, in a little Hillman Minx station wagon, which Edward had outfitted with two swings because we had two little ones in tow. In 1955, my oldest child was five, my daughter, Debra, was five—my son, Jon, who's in the middle, was about two and a half, somewhere in there. And Vicki was in the process of enjoying life in the embryonic stage.

[laughs]

So, we came in May, and Vicki was born in October in California. The other two were born in New York.

Vanderscoff: And you had been in New York City from '50 to '55?

Ellis: Yes, we had been in; yes, in New York, from '50 to '55.

Vanderscoff: So how did you feel about the idea of moving to California—

Ellis: I loved it, I loved it.

Vanderscoff: But of course, all your family was back there in New York still.

Ellis: I know, but we did have some family: we had some uncles, cousins, and that second-tier family—you know, not immediate family—who were in the LA area. My Uncle Harry, about whom I've talked, and his wife, lived in the LA area. And so, we had a place to come to with the children for a while, until we found our footing, as it were. And indeed, we did do that.

Edward established a business, a wonderful—he was an excellent mechanic. He was kind of an intuitive—aside from skillful acquisition of absolute elementary and more sophisticated modes of preparing engines, he had acquired a great deal of expertise during his flight mechanic years in the air force, as I believe I mentioned yesterday. The other excellent aspect of a business personality, which he did have, was the fact that he was quite garrulous, extremely—for a Brit—extroverted. Enjoyed long, meaningful, *and* meaningless conversations [*laughs*] as long as he could be the chief interlocutor, the chief monologist, to

some extent. But he just enjoyed conversation and trading ideas and honing notions and discussing and arguing. All of that sort of thing—very verbal.

And as I believe I mentioned to you yesterday, my son has inherited that propensity. Not, of course, that I'm exactly mute, but still, there was the inspiration of their father, who had also a very charming North Country accent. Because he was from, not London, southern England, but rather from [*affecting accent*] Manchester. And they had a provincial accent, which was quite charming. [*affecting accent with long 'oo' sound*] We took the books to cook the books—you know, the kind of slurring of certain vowels, diminishing and burdening them, was part of the regional accent that he had.

People enjoyed very much discussing with him all aspects of life and the many experiences that he had. So, he would spend hours just sitting—Vicki can tell you, because even when she was little, she would go down to the garage and watch him in action and enjoy. And he would give her little tasks to do around the cars, which was wonderful for her, this little kid having that kind of experience and listening to her father hold forth.

Vanderscoff: And so, as for you, one thing that you mentioned is that when you were seventeen, you go into this theater language program. And so, you're getting some training to be an actress, and one of the things that happened is that your Madame Danièl—am I remembering this?

Ellis: Yes.

Vanderscoff: —wanted you to go see a Broadway actress.

Ellis: Yes. Actually, we did even try to have an appointment to go and see her. But unfortunately, she was offered a Hollywood contract and left NY to make movies before we could arrange to visit her. So, it was just as well that we never managed to see her.

Apparently, I was not destined for a life in the theater.

But I believe that teaching, after all, is so much a means of theatrical expression. Because one has a script. One has a role. One has an audience. One has a public. One has all of the many concomitant features that attend to the life of being a thespian and communicating in that way. So, there are many relevances involved. And in fact, I would use theater in my classes, too, a great deal. Having groups—just as a modus, a pedagogic mode, having the students break into groups. I would give them, or they would pick out of my hat, a topic to discuss, and they would have five minutes to write a little script—this was in French, of course—about the object at hand. It generally was some kind of a conflictive situation. It was perhaps a child-parent discussion of something, or argument, or siblings, two siblings, or two friends, or whoever. In other words, they were doing role playing. And they were picking up bits of vocabulary as they went through this little *charade*. So that was kind of fun for them, as well as instructional.

So, theater in the classroom as a means of acquiring a greater linguistic breadth, is also not a bad idea, and that extended into the whole notion of theater as a pedagogic tool, which ultimately became the Miriam Ellis International Playhouse.

So here we are. It all fits together, really, when you look at it that way, Cameron. And that's very synthetic of you to see that, by the way.

Vanderscoff: That's super interesting. I'd like to explore a lot of that. But just going back to the fifties and sixties and your own experience, so you've decided by this time that you're not going to go to be an actor yourself. And so, can you just give a picture of what your life was like if we talked about those 1950s years, those early 1960s?

Ellis: In the 1950s, I think I mentioned to you yesterday that I had this group of children, three of them, of my own, to take care of and to rear. And there came a point in my life of living with three people who were under three feet high, right, all the time. In other words, being a stay-at-home mom.

By the way, I also did all of the bookkeeping for our nascent business, for the garage. I did all of the correspondence. I did all of the acquisition of parts. Vicki would be my second mate as we drove many, many miles sometimes. Because the possibility of obtaining parts for these British cars that were now starting to be imported, as England became more and more, not quite "normal"—it took many years for normalcy to come back to Europe—but back to production, at least of some of their popular models. And we started to import them here, the early days of Jags and MGs and Austins and Triumphs—and many, many of which I drove, because they were left at the garage and needed to have a run out or whatever. And so, I would get a chance to drive many of them.

And so, Vicki would go with me to go and find the English parts businesses, which were almost always way downtown. And we lived out in the Valley, so it was quite a drive to find these places where we could acquire the parts necessary for the repairs that were underway. I would drive a lot of those cars. I got a chance to road test a lot of them. It was interesting too, and exciting and very rewarding to do that.

Vanderscoff: Any special memories of going around LA in a Jaguar or an Aston Martin or something?

Ellis: Oh, sure. Not too many Jags, not too many Jags. There was a Jag specialist that opened a garage, actually, in the Valley, I believe. And it took really a great deal of training to be able to repair those—always, they were very, very complex. But Edward managed. He found his way around things. And as I said, he was an intuitive mechanic. He had really great skill in that regard, among other skills. Aston Martins—no! Now you're really talking about specialization and big wads of cash.

Vanderscoff: And so, I wonder about your own experience of your own life in these years, where you're helping run this business and then you're a stay-at-home mom, right? My own mother was a stay-at-home mother, and she loved that, right. And then there are other people who have different feelings about it. So, what was your own experience of—

Ellis: I loved it *jusqu'à un certain point*, up to a certain point. There came a time when, like Betty Friedan—who wrote that marvelous book at the time, *The Feminine Mystique*, you know, what do women want? I became one of those who said, "What do women want?" And I wanted more than just being a mother or a wife of a businessperson. I needed more than that.

Wanting to be More than a Wife and Mother: Going Back to School

One fine day, I made up my mind that I was going to go back to school. And lo and behold, my son Jonathan applied for UC Santa Cruz. And he wrote such a crazy, off-the-wall essay, that he was accepted. In those days, they were super, super picky in terms of whom they accepted.

The campus had, I believe, a student population of 4,000. Since it was this new, innovative, absolutely-no-holds-barred, off-the-wall, we'll-try-almost-anything campus, there were an enormous number of students who applied, who were trying to get into Santa Cruz in those days. Still today we have quite, I believe, a good application number each year. Because it quickly got to have a reputation for being *the* place, the jewel in the crown of the UC campuses. If you wanted to design your own major, it was a possibility as an undergrad. And you could even give classes if you had a certain expertise as an undergrad—with a faculty member, of course, as your supervisor. You could offer a class, things of that nature. And we had group independent studies. I did a lot of those with a small group of students who were like-minded in wanting to learn about a particular subject. Learning was so much the coin of the realm, learning for its own sake, for the joy of learning. Absolutely Cowell's marvelous guideline about "in the company of friends," the idea of exploring and discovery in the company of friends, was a lovely, lovely manifesto to go by.²⁴

So, Jonathan was accepted here, and he came up here. Shortly afterwards, I finished my master's, which was supposedly a terminal master's, which meant you're not going to go on. It was very, very demanding. I finished that at San Fernando Valley State, which became Cal State University Northridge (CSUN).

Vanderscoff: Oh, so would you mind going back and explaining your decision to go back to college in the first place?

²⁴ Cowell College's motto is "The pursuit of truth in the company of friends."

Ellis: Yes, I went back to school when Vicki had the ripe old age of two years, to put it in the French way. She was two, and I started, at night, to take classes. That was in 1957. And I got my doctorate from UC Santa Cruz in 1979, eight years after I had come up here. It took me eight years to finish it.

Vanderscoff: This would be twenty-two years after when you first started going back to school.

Ellis: Yes, twenty-two years. Why? Well, I did it slowly, Cameron. I did not take full loads. I took, let's say two or three classes at a time. I started back with Russian, which is an *ochen' trudnyj jazyk*, which means a very difficult language. *Na—vsjo zabyła*, But, I forgot everything. It's only been, you know, how many years ago that I studied it.

Now, Vicki still remembers her Russian. She has taken many—she's very linguistically endowed, by the way, very much so.

Vanderscoff: It's all in the family for you all.

Ellis: Well, I guess, maybe. Jonathan goes around the world and somehow, he makes his way in science with English, more or less. He's learned a few words in many, many languages. But on the whole, he does it in English, because it's all scientific vocabulary. In many places, they just don't have the words. And Debra has a good gift. She has a good ear, too, a good gift for some linguistic forays, not particularly on an academic level, and is a talented comedienne.

Vanderscoff: So, I have a question about your decision to go back to school. It's kind of two parts: one is, was there a certain moment or moments that you can recall where you said,

“There needs to be something else in my life? I want to bring something else in my life?” And then B, why was it going back to school?

Ellis: Yes, there were many of those moments when I just said, “There’s got to be more to life than this. There has to be.” I mean, I loved the children madly, loved helping with the business. The business was growing. We were able to survive. A very bourgeois period of our lives—we had this big house, and it was actually in Northridge, opposite a magnificent [*sighs*] orange grove, where the smell, when those trees were in blossom, literally would intoxicate you. You’d just kind of stagger around because we were just right across from it, [*indicating*] here was the grove, and here were the homes that they built. They were quite, as I say, bourgeois. And we had the requisite pool—in fact, a very imaginative pool. It had an island that you could swim through in the middle of this pool. Because the fellow that built it had been a customer of Edward’s in the garage, and he said that he wanted to build pools that reminded him of his old swimming hole back wherever, Ohio—I don’t remember where he came from. And so, ours he painted a dark brown and mottled green on the inside, so it looked very picturesque and very rural. And as I say, here was this island, which you could climb up on and dive off, if you wanted, into the deep part of the pool. And it was quite free-formed.

Vicki will remember more about the pool. The children became excellent swimmers. Right from very young, they learned the right way because their father was a marvelous swimmer. He taught them, not I. I always had one foot on the bottom. [*laughs*] That’s what they would always tell me, which is probably true, but never mind. In one corner, the pool had a bubble in which the builder put a Jacuzzi. So, you could go in there and have a hot bath and relax.

And there was a waterfall that came off the island in the middle. It was quite a pool, that one, quite unique.

Vanderscoff: So, in the middle of all of that, what would be an example of one of those moments where you say, “I need something else? I need something more?”

Ellis: Yes, well, particularly pragmatically, when Jonathan was accepted here.

Vanderscoff: But by then, you had already decided to go back to school.

Ellis: Yes, I had already decided that I have to do more with whatever there is in life for me, than just be at home and be just the nurse, the caretaker, the caregiver, the role model, the everything that a mother is, you know. And at the same time, keep the house going. It was large—it was probably twice the size of this little place. I think it was 3000 square feet, and this one is less than 2000.

Vanderscoff: Why do you think it was that you wanted to go back to school, in particular? What did that mean to you at that time?

Ellis: Well, that meant to me that I could hone some of these many interests that I had. Because I did not mention one other thing, and that is that while I was doing my Master’s at San Fernando State College—what it was called then, before it became part of the state university system—they had established a new program called the Office of International Programs. And they needed someone to run it. So, I applied for the job. And lo and behold, I became the director of the Office of International Programs.

So, I added another element to what I was doing, besides the business and the home and the children, and that was starting to interact and communicate with foreign students. We had students from forty countries around the world. They were not from rich countries. They were from the struggling Third World, beginning to crawl out of the Middle Ages or whatever time warp they were in. And so, they wanted their brightest and their best young people to get a good education abroad and bring home all the savvy to help build their rudimentary modernizing cultures at home.

This is just what happened. We had these students who were hungry, hungry, hungry to learn come to us at Valley State. That was the time of Sputnik, and that was the time of the Cold War and the race with Russia. The Russians had established foreign student programs in which they paid all the tuition and the upkeep and gave stipends to foreign students to come to *Moskva* to study and to be indoctrinated. So, there was that kind of competition. In California, they decided—this is before we got Ronald Reagan as a governor, before that—they had decided to offer foreign students the same cost of tuition as native Californians. It was like \$64 or something a semester for fees. You know, completely nothing. And so, this is how we started to attract foreign students. I was there to take care of them, to help them. I became the FSA, the Foreign Student Advisor.

And since we had this big house and it was quite close to the college—a few minutes away—I used to have company all the time in the house. The pool, of course; they adored the pool, as you can imagine. And so, we had foreign students, just as I told you yesterday, when I was growing up, we always had foreigners hanging around the house. Well, here we were again. They would come for birthdays, or they could come just for a little *fiesta* of some kind, a little

fête, or dinner, or just whatever the reason or no reason, or exams were over, or what have you.

It was wonderful. And my kids, my own children interacted with young people from all of these different countries. What a great thing it was for them, too. Vicki can tell you a little bit.
[*calls over to next room*] Vick! Vicki Hey, Vick!

Vicki: What?

Ellis: Come on in here for a minute, please. I'd like to have you fill in something for my discussion with Cameron. Will you come in here, please? [*to interviewer*] Because she can tell you more readily and more sincerely and from her point of view what she remembers about the foreign students.

Vicki: [*Entering*] Are you calling me?

Vanderscoff: She is calling you.

Vicki: What do you need?

Ellis: I'm in Northridge. I described the pool to him, and the house. It was big and roomy, and how the foreign students used to come over all the time. Do you remember that while you were growing up, Vick?

Vicki: Yes.

Ellis: Could you tell Cameron anything about some of those foreign students? Do you remember them?

Vicky: Well, there were some from Peru. Or they were from places in South America where there had been big earthquakes. Who was that one, Rosario— Somebody stayed with us—in '71, there was a pretty big earthquake in LA—and she stayed at our house, and she couldn't sleep because she was so afraid. I remember her sitting in the den all night with the light on. And Mom let her stay at the house for I don't know how many days or nights.

So yeah, I grew up around a lot of people from other parts of the world. There were parties and dinners.

Ellis: Yes. So, you do have some reminiscences.

Vicki: Of course, I remember a lot of that. Nagabhushan Rao Machiraju.

Ellis: Oh, and of course!

Vicki: Friends that would come camping with us sometimes. It was really nice.

Ellis: From India. The biggest challenge was learning their names. This fellow from India, Nagabhushan Rao Machiraju— he's called Rao. He is now a distinguished visiting professor at USC. He's stayed in the US, and he's at USC—and worked for Apple early on. A brilliant, brilliant young man. Actually, he and Jonathan are quite close friends, even to this day— because of this early connection that they had from when I was the FSA.

Vanderscoff: So that's remarkable that you recreated a house that had the similarities to your own home growing up, people [*crosstalk*]—

Ellis: Yes, that's very true, now that you mention it. I never even thought of that, but it's true, yes. The Other was very welcome.

And the other thing I did with the foreign students was that I would have cultural evenings or days. For example, we had one student who was a marvelous artist. I have a few of his paintings still—Wilson Chang was his name. I still have a few of his paintings in the house. I did an art exhibit for him, to which the community came. I bought a few of his paintings, and other people did, too.

It was quite a wealthy community there in Northridge, by the way. And these students were taken in to live, except the Black students had problems finding housing with some of the snobs in Northridge. But I even had one student who was from—I'm forgetting now where she was from, but she was a princess or something. She was from western Africa, and very beautiful. She stayed with one of the families. Yes, they showed her off.

Vanderscoff: So, if it was your job to accommodate these student needs, how would you work with Black international students to deal with American prejudice?

Ellis: Yes, that was very difficult, to find housing for them in the area near the university, near the college. But we managed to do it somehow. We did manage. There were enough open-minded families that took them in. And most of these students worked, in order to survive. Some of them had several jobs and still got A's—they were so motivated. These were not the oil barons of the world, the spoiled brat progeny with their racing cars. These students were from the poor countries, the developing countries, and the needy countries. They were so appreciative of everything that we did to help them. So, many of them went home and brought good pictures of America with them, and good experiences of having learned that they were capable of a lot, and what they could try and offer colleagues.

Vanderscoff: What do you think that you and your family learned from having this contact with students from so many different places in the world, and who were coming from countries that had economic hardship? For you and your family, what do you think the impact was?

Ellis: I think that it was really important for the children. I know Edward certainly enjoyed it very much, because he was an “Other,” you know. He was the Other, too, in America, until—he became acclimated to the food, for instance, for one thing. His meat and potatoes, yes, the meat and potatoes and ice cream diet. Oh really, all the things that he had to become acclimated to. But he did.

And so, did the foreign students, eventually. They became acclimated. It took some of them more time than others. You don’t realize it when you displace, when you replace a whole cultural source of confidence and stability, and it’s suddenly all torn up and replaced with completely new everything: new tastes, new smells, new experiences, a new concept of self in a larger, different milieu. You know, all of that—it’s very hard to be a foreign student.

Now they don’t call them that anymore. Now they’re called “international students.” No more “foreign students,” yes. I have been trying to get some of our international students on campus, through the brilliant idea of my co-producer-associate Renée Cailloux, who’s very, very important to the Playhouse, and came up with this great idea of trying to get some of the international students to play some roles, to become part of some of our offerings. I had some of them in French a couple of years ago, just by chance, and I’d like to do that again. It was great for the American students to have that experience, too, to work with native speakers.

So anyway, getting back to your—so your question about the foreign students' influence, I think, on my immediate—

Vanderscoff: On you and your family, yes. Because you've talked about some of maybe what they got out of it. But I'm wondering what the impact was on you, having people from all over the world in your house.

Ellis: Oh yes, yes, it was just wonderful. It was so enriching. It was great. In fact, when I decided that it was time for me to leave and to come up here—and that was in '71, after Jonathan had been accepted and he had moved up here. I came up to visit him, and I saw the campus. I just, of course, fell madly in love with the campus and everything about it. And I said, "You know what? I think I'm going to apply here to do my doctorate," because I had finished the MA.

Oh, and what happened was, I finished the MA; we had the earthquake, which was a real scare.²⁵ Yes, Vicki's right about it being scary. It was. All the negative things came together. We got a new dean, who took over the running of the Office of International Programs and questioned and put me on the carpet, and questioned a lot of the things that I was doing. And he forbade me to talk to the press—you know, censorship time. He knew nothing about the students, cared less. But he was the authoritarian bureaucrat, throwing his deanship around this mere female, who was supposed to be in charge.

And I would talk to the press, because we did all these cultural programs for which I wanted to get some publicity, so people would come. And indeed, they did. We had publicity. I had

²⁵ In reference to the 1971 Sylmar Earthquake, also known as the San Fernando Earthquake.

pretty good relations with both the press and people on the radio, on TV in the area. I got to know them from all of the exposure that I wanted for my students, who were so talented. Some of them were wonderfully talented in different ways. We had dancers. We had musicians. We had this artist, Wilson, I told you about. I remember a group of Filipino students who were marvelous, a little dance group they had. And some Latino dancers from different Central and South American countries, who liked to perform as well. They were good enough to perform.

I really enjoyed so much showing off the riches of having these *autres*, these Other cultures here, for the community to have some idea of what it meant, this internationalization. That was something that was beginning to be proposed, especially with, as I mentioned, the Cold War going on. So, to me, this group of students was a great asset to the campus and to the community at large, to share their cultural—I remember I had an Indian cultural evening, because I had both Rao, whom we mentioned, who was from one part of India and then I had this older student, a fellow who was a very strict, vegetarian. So was Rao. They were both vegetarian. So, we had an evening of Indian culture, where we had a fellow called Krishnamurti, who was a marvelous—oh, what is the instrument now that I'm thinking of?

Vanderscoff: An Indian instrument?

Ellis: Oh, yes, the sitar.

Vanderscoff: Sitar, yeah.

Ellis: And he gave a concert, a recital; yes, he gave one. So, we had the music. And then we had the food—we had from North India and from South India, and the guests could see the

diversity in the food. So, the students prepared food; we sold food. And we had some artifacts. I have several things on my shelves, by the way, that were gifts to me from my foreign students. For instance, there's a little platter there, where you can see dancers from Thailand. That was from some Thai students. You know, they gave me things like that. And I have—

Vanderscoff: Oh yeah, so we're looking at a [*crosstalk*]—

Ellis: Some dolls, or some little dishes, or some bits of sculpture. A lot of the other things I have on my shelves come from my French friend, who just delights in sending me all kinds of things from France, or from wherever, that he feels like he wants to share. He's like a member of the family. We've known him forever. We met him because Vicki met him at a gas station in Santa Barbara, [*laughs*] and she brought him home with a friend of his. And he and the friend stayed with us.

Vanderscoff: He was hitching or something?

Ellis: He was hitching, yes, across the country and across Canada. And that was Jean Claude. I have a picture of him and his family up there. Where's Jean Claude? You can see a picture of the children and parents and the grandparents. Anyway, Jean Claude and his family are up there on the bookshelf somewhere. So, there's a bit of other internationalism.

Of course, another bit of international family relationship is my wonderful, beautiful, extremely intelligent daughter-in-law, Susanne, who is like another daughter to me. And the fellow with her—that's their wedding picture there [*indicating*]—the fellow with her is my son, Jonathan. At the moment, they're in China. They'll be home on the third of October, I hope. They've been there since the sixth of September. He's been to conferences in four

different cities and giving papers and discussing his new dream project, of which he has had many.

Vanderscoff: So, when you mentioned hitchhiking, that brings something else to mind. So, by this time, you're entering the late 1960s in LA, and this is the time where the counterculture's rising up. You're working at a college, and then soon you come up to Santa Cruz. And so, I wonder what your take on the counterculture was, especially as a parent with young children, and the counterculture and the music and the lifestyle and the drugs and all of that, and just what you made of that?

Ellis: We had all of that on campus, of course, in those days, pretty rife and pretty open. Yes, well, my children were growing up as teenagers during all of that unrest and searching. It was a time of great searching by young people. And not only by young people, by all people who thought about such things, I guess. Because the world was becoming more and more complex. Technology, the idea of computers starting, that was a huge change. Even the idea of TV was such an enormous atomic bomb, as it were, to shake you up and wake you up and give you things to think about what might be—you know, the endless possibilities of a new world. Radio and records, that was what you had, and then bit by bit all this other kind of escapism inserted itself. Like the TV. The first time that my family saw a TV was at the home of my brother. And it was about that big.

Vanderscoff: So, you're indicating maybe just a foot and a half by a foot, or something.

Ellis: Something like that. And there were these people running around in black and white, of course, not in color—people on a set, three-dimensional, and there we were, being able to

watch them. We were all just oohing and aahing, catching our best breath and trying to think, “What on earth is going on?” Yeah, right here in his home, to have that. Yes, that was TV.

Vanderscoff: So, you say that it was a time of technological change and cultural change, and a time of great searching for many people. Was it a time of searching for you, Miriam, would you say?

Ellis: Oh yes, absolutely. ‘68, of course, in Europe was enormous for the youth, the big rebellion of the students who were joined by the *ouvriers*, by the workers, and even by the intellectuals.

Yes, so a time of great foment, the late sixties, early seventies. So, I wasn’t, I guess, too far off the mark of the zeitgeist by wanting to start yet another chapter of life by going back to school. After having gone through all of the preliminary education—I got the AA, the BA, the MA, which took me all those years. It was not easy, Cameron, to be a full-time mother who, when the children went to school, became a part-time student. And to take disparate courses, as the time schedule allowed, so that I would be home when they were home from school. It was none of this latchkey business. That was not my *modus operandi* with my kids. I wanted to be there when they were home. And so, I was, for the most part. And yet I managed to get straight A’s in all my classes because that was the only grade that was acceptable. I finished the BA as *summa cum laude*. So that was nice.

Coming to UC Santa Cruz as a Graduate Student in Literature

And then—oh, I must tell you this. Then I put in my application to come to this campus as a graduate student in the field of French literature. I came up here with Edward on a weekend,

and we stayed over until Monday so I could go and visit people on campus. I called several people whose names were given to me and spoke to them on the phone, and then had *in viva voce* visits with a few of the relevant faculty who were available on campus to see me for a few minutes.

I was greeted with the news that, “Yes, we received your application. But frankly, we turned you down.” That was the way I was received. And I said, “Oh really?” Well, I said, “It couldn’t have been my grades,” because I had 4.0. I had straight A’s with everything, even the sciences—not only the humanities, the sciences, the social sciences, everything that I needed to take, all through my career. So, I said, “Oh, you turned me down?” And that’s after Jonathan was here, right, as a student. And I said, “Well”—

I had interviews with, I remember, with Joe Silverman and a French lit professor. Joe, bless his heart, turned out to be my thesis director, by the way. I did it in Spanish with Joe, because he was the most *simpatico*, and *the right one* for me to work with, in terms of philosophy of education and all sorts of other things, and just personality-wise. I believe that I was his last graduate student before his very, very sad and untimely demise. Dear Joe, it was wonderful working with him. And so that was how I managed to do *La Francesilla (The Charming Little Frenchwoman.)*.

Vanderscoff: But you say that they turned you down. So, what happened then?

Ellis: Yes, they turned me down. And so, I said something to one of the faculty members, a French literature professor. The graduate program was almost non-existent. They had a very small graduate program, particularly in literature, and even more particularly in the foreign

literatures, French and Spanish, which is what I actually did, classes in both of those areas. For my doctoral orals, I had a reading list of over 100 titles because I needed to know both French and Spanish lit, and there was an enormous amount there. Much more in French than in Spanish, but plenty in both. And so, I had a *mélange* of professors on my committee because I was in both of the literatures.

Vanderscoff: So, given you had these excellent grades—

Ellis: Oh yeah, so I said to him—you know, *la bouche*, as the French call it. They have a marvelous expression for so many things, and this is one: “*La langue bien pendue*,” which means “the well-hung tongue.” [*laughs*] In other words, the gift of oral communication.

Vanderscoff: The gift of gab.

Ellis: The gift of gab, yes. Much more imagistic in the French, you can see it. So, when I was told just right straight out, with no holds barred, to my face, “Oh, well, we turned you down”—with a great deal of nonchalance, by the way. Not even a semblance of an imitation of a feeling of, “Oh, sorry, sorry about that,” or “Oh, too bad,” or “Go peddle your fish elsewhere,” or anything—not a hint of interest or regret or pardon. So, I said, “Well, it could only have been two reasons.” I said, “It couldn’t have been my grades. So, it must have been either my age or my sex.” Period. That’s all I said. And then I left, and I went back to Northridge.

Two weeks later, I received a letter accepting me to the graduate program in French literature. I added Spanish after I got here. I believe, I think they offered it to me in French literature. They had a very small Spanish literature program, very small. The French

wasn't—in fact, this was not a campus to do a doctorate in literature, period. Really, that was not a *forte* in the seventies.

Vanderscoff: And had you considered applying anywhere else?

Ellis: No, I hadn't. Once I had been here and seen the campus and seen what Jonathan was doing, the whole MO, I just said, "Oh, I really have to go there. It's just incredible." Because not only of the physical setting, which is so miraculous—

Vanderscoff: Yes, what were your first impressions of the campus? What did it look like when you'd come up? This is in 1971 you're visiting?

Ellis: Incredulity—that's a word, "incredulity?" Isn't that a word?

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Ellis: *Incroyable, j'étais absolument frappée, incroyablement. Incroyable*, it was incredible to see the forest, to see the layout, just to see Stevenson and to go to Cowell, go next door to Cowell and to see that view. And to see those trees, those magnificent trees, and thinking, immediately being transported to the idea of being able to sit under those trees and open the books and pursue knowledge in a setting like this. How could one fail to be inspired and to be motivated and to feel such hope and such promise and such creative possibilities in an atmosphere like this? I think that's really what did it. And then I looked around, and I saw this population of such fresh faces and such positive attitudes towards everything. [*phone rings*] And just the openness of the way people interacted with each other, both students and— [*picking up phone*] Who is it?

Vanderscoff: I think Vicki got it.

Ellis: Vicki got it? Good, I hope so. [*sets down phone*] The openness, the way students even related to some of their professors here, calling them by their first name—that was a real, shock at first! Whereas before, of course, in my experience, everyone in academe was on the podium or on the pedestal. And here, it was so free. It seemed, on its face, to be so real, so genuine, so really devoted. It got me to be really thinking of even something like the old Greeks, the Peripatetic tutors who would wander from little hamlet to little town, to a little group to spread their knowledge, most of the time, orally. It was just lectures, speaking— It took me back to feelings of that, to the unity, to the consequentiality of the whole thing, of the potential, because of the approach to putting together what we could learn, what we could aspire to make our own, in different ways, in such an environment, in such a physical environment where so many artifices could be cast off, and were being cast off. People were not afraid to be vulnerable, to some extent. I guess I'm being hyperbolic, no doubt, here. But you're asking me the feelings of the seventies of the campus, and I believe that that comes to me.

In those days, you couldn't walk five steps without meeting someone that you knew from some area of the campus already, whether it was from eating in the same cafeteria, or sharing space in the same dorm, or being in some kind of class. Or somebody wanting to do something and being encouraged to do it, just because it was doable, with the help of various people pitching in together. It wasn't this frenetic scramble for the best grades and outdoing the seven other people in the class who were going to be getting the A's, and you wanted desperately to get an A. There was none of that. That was not a factor. It was not there. It

didn't enter into it. That was marvelous. That was getting to the purity of the actual thing that it should be about, which is acquiring an understanding of yourself, the cosmos, other people, life as far as we can know, whatever you're delving into. You know, the possibility for the *véridique*, for the real and the truthful, and attaining, and the conquering of challenges. And getting to know what you're capable of doing, letting yourself be freed up enough to investigate that. Because who knows? You never know until you try, until you try those closed doors and see if there's, indeed, anything behind them or just emptiness. Maybe there's a golden land behind some of those closed doors, or bits of remarkable possibilities. But you have to have the wherewithal to open those little doors, those magic— This is what I try all the time with the theater project, to try and get students to become *aware* of the possibilities that lie within them, to open doors that they never knew existed and see what might be behind them, or see what they can bring to place behind them, in a secret, precious place. Know thyself: easy two words, right, which are a world, which are what we're here about. Or try and find out about yourself. Seek—see what there is. That was what this campus meant to me in those days, and still does, to a great extent.

And I must say—I don't know, I didn't ask you, Cameron. You have interviewed many people from campus, haven't you?

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Ellis: Have you interviewed many lecturers on campus?

Vanderscoff: Mostly professors.

Ellis: Yeah, mostly people who are on the ladder, as they say.

Vanderscoff: Yes, on the ladder. Yes, that's right. And so yes, and so as we move through, I have a lot of questions about your particular experience.

Ellis: In what regard?

Vanderscoff: About your particular experience as a lecturer.

Ellis: Oh yes, my particular experience.

Vanderscoff: Yes, I'm quite curious.

But before we go there, you're using this lovely metaphor of doors and knowing that you have to open them, right. But if we go to that moment in 1971, you know—

Ellis: Well, they tried to close the door for me, you see? Because it turned out—I found out the real reason. It wasn't my age or my sex, as far as I have ascertained. It was my preparation. In those days, they were very, very proud about name-dropping, like Ivy League preparation for such a great percentage of the faculty here. And what had I done? My preparation was public university. No prestige, nothing. So, what if I had excellent grades? What did that mean? Well, it meant that I worked very hard, which I did. And that I got to understand how to attain such a grade, what it took to give it that attention. That's what it meant. But it did not come from Yale or Harvard or, you name any of them, Stanford or any of those fancy ones, of which I don't even know. I am pleased to say that the preparation that I got, even in the junior college I went to, was extraordinary, and was done by people who were very, very committed to their work, and of a very high quality of education and of demands and requirements.

But be that as it may, I don't know how many times they have regretted having me on campus. I do know that the fact of being a lecturer is somewhat like—I started out already, let's say, with a negative balance to my *renommée*, to my reputation or to my status or whatever you want to call it, on the campus, as being a second-class citizen because I was a grad student. I was considered pretty low on the level of status. And then, again, the lecturer has been relegated to a lower class than people on the ladder, even though you may have the requisite credentials and background and experience.

I have given papers at conferences—I have been invited. I have been given the *Chevalier des Palmes académiques*, of which I believe there are now—let's see, there are Hervé and Gildas [Hamel] and David [Orlando], and Jon [Beecher] in history. And I believe I am the fifth. There are now five people on campus who have been given that honor by the French government. I don't know if you're familiar with the academic palm, because they have different kinds of palm, the laurel wreath. So figuratively, it's called, when they give you the honor, they “palm” you.

So, one is Jon Beecher, who is the historian with an emphasis in French history. And the other four were in language. Gildas Hamel, who is a complete Renaissance *savant*, with a truly brilliant intellectual, marvelously broad and receptive and eclectic mind, who has taught classics here. He has taught Greek and Latin here, aside from French, of course. He has published books which have become textbooks. His area is the ancient Middle East. He's a biblical scholar on ancient Palestine and Rome and all of that. That's his era of great *spécialité*, specialization.

Vanderscoff: So, it's Jon Beecher, Gildas—

Ellis: Jon Beecher, Gildas Hamel.²⁶ David Orlando in language, a wonderful, wonderful colleague, whom I met in 1972. I know him probably—he and Sherwood [Dudley] I've known the same length of time, since '72. No, Sherwood I met in '71—it was even a little before. Maybe I met David in '71, too, because—

Anyway, so Gildas, David, Hervé le Mansec—Hervé was the acting French consul of the whole San Jose area. So, he's in the diplomatic corps. They gave him the *Palme académique* too for his work in academe. And Jon, and I guess, myself. We are the five recipients of the Palmes on campus, as far as I know. I may have missed someone. It's very possible.

Vanderscoff: And so, we'll trace that journey along, leading to the *chevalier* and also through your own work as a lecturer. But something I want to be sure that we get on the record is—so you get this letter in 1971, admitting you after being rejected. But at this point, you're still working at what's now CSUN, in Northridge. And there was another story that you were telling before that, that I want to be sure to close the circle on, which is that you had a new dean there who didn't seem to know how to deal with—

Ellis: And the circle became, because these students were so near and dear to my heart, and they were here on so little money—they were so poor, is what they were, and struggling, and so needy, and so, what's the word, *dignes, dignes*, to be worthy, that's the word—to be *worthy* of great support and attention and help. We got this new dean, and we got this new governor who decided that he needed to raise one million dollars—there was a shortfall in the budget. His name was Ronald Reagan. We used to know him in the old days, when he was in

²⁶ I took classes with Jon Beecher and Gildas Hamel as an undergraduate—Cameron Vanderscoff.

Hollywood. And then he became Ronald Reagan when he became a politician. The name became gentrified.²⁷ Sad to say, the character did not. He decided that, “Oh, these foreign students here. They’re not paying their way. We’re going to raise the fees.”

They trebled or quadrupled the rate of the fees from what I had told you before, from a modest sum, which they had come under contract to pay. And he just overnight magnified that amount to the point where I had one student who attempted suicide, because to go home in disgrace—which this would have meant for many of them—was culturally such an ignominious end to their adventure abroad in the golden land of the USA. Not to mention what an unjust thing, an immoral thing it was to do to these struggling and hard-working and dedicated young people who were so worthy.

Of course, that was my subjective standpoint, right. I was not an administrator who needed to raise a million dollars somewhere, somehow. So, I went to the dean, this new dean, when I heard that news. I said what I felt about it. And I said, “Would it be possible for these students to make installment payments of their fees?” He would not allow that. So that was it. I just more or less said, “Thank you very much. But I believe it’s my time to say, ‘I resign.’” And so, I did. I decided, “It’s time to join Jonathan in Santa Cruz.”

Vanderscoff: So how long after you resigned from Northridge do you come to—is that right away that you come to Santa Cruz?

²⁷ Miriam first pronounced Reagan like “Ree-gan,” and then in its more familiar presidential form as “Ray-gan.”

Ellis: No, it was a matter of a short time. I don't remember offhand. A short time, a few weeks probably, whatever. And it was soon after I had those interviews that I told you about, where they told me that I was turned down. In retrospect, it seems to have been not long thereafter.

That was a big break on my part, too, obviously. It was a big decision on my part to just decide to reinvent my life, as it were, by coming up here, not being down there anymore. You know, that's a six-hour car trip. It's not bad on a plane, as you know, coming from LA. It's not bad plane-wise, but driving, it's long. It was a big break. Edward had ensconced himself in his business quite—I should say “entrenched” himself. It was very hard. This is a very personal matter now, but I'll mention it. And that is that, frankly, I think he was just not confident enough. He was afraid to make the break of closing the business down there and moving up here. It was too iffy. And I don't blame him. He had put a lot into making that business what it was. And his health wasn't very good anymore. We later found out that he had developed a very rare form of cancer, of the blood, I believe. He would never agree to go to a doctor, which made the situation very difficult. And I believe a large part of his illness was due to the work environment—inhaling all those fumes and poisons for all those years did not help. And the smog didn't help, either. The air was not very good in LA by then.

He kept promising me that he was planning to move up here. But that, sadly, never came to fruition. So eventually, I saw that I had to make some decisions, and after several years, we divorced. It took a while for that to happen.

Then, quite serendipitously, I met Paul, which led to yet another chapter in my life, to be personal. We knew each other for several years, and then we married. And *me voilà*, here I am. And one huge tragedy in my life was losing Paul five years ago. He left us. He had been

ill, and he left us. [*sighs*] I miss him terribly. The children loved him very much. He was first great friends with Jonathan, and then got to know Vicki and Debra, as well. They all accepted him very endearingly, which was nice, and not always the case when there is a disruption in a long marriage and another one is assumed. But my children are very open-minded and quite nonjudgmental when it comes to the right things.

Vanderscoff: So, for you, here we are. It's 1971. You're coming to Santa Cruz. And it's this very big personal, professional, vocational—

Ellis: Yes, it was a big step.

Vanderscoff: —chapter in your life. It's a change. And one thing that you said is that your son was already here. And I wonder, so—

Ellis: And then Vicki followed—Vicki followed us here. She did her last semester of high school— [*calling into next room*] didn't you, Vick? Was it the last semester or the last two semesters? Vick?

Vanderscoff: [*after a silence and no reply*] She might have gone out of the other room.

Ellis: Deb was already married, and had her life down in LA. She was already established there. And her son was born in '82, so she had her life down south, and still lives there. She likes that lifestyle, and she's going to stay there. Although she loves to come up to Santa Cruz and get our fresh air [*laughs*] for the time she's here. So maybe she'll even move up here someday. Who knows? It's possible.

Vanderscoff: So, what years do your two children start at UCSC for undergrad?

Ellis: Jonathan began in '70—I guess it must have been '70, because when I came, as I said, in '71, he was already ensconced here. He was already on his way, taking classes. He liked it a lot. He was in College Five, actually, for a while, before he got into the sciences. And then he went into marine biology, and he loved that. He worked with some of the truly great scientists we had on this campus, many of whom became good friends of his. He got to know them because that's the way it was—he got to know them on a very personal level. It was a possibility. He always had these ideas, new things to look at, and new ways to look at them, and he is still a seeker.

Vanderscoff: So, your son's here from '70. And then when does Vicki come here?

Ellis: [*calling more loudly*] Vicki when did you come to do your last year? Vick? Hello?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, she must have gone further off. That's all right. We can fill that in. So, part of what I'm wondering is how does your son Jonathan react when you tell him, "Well, son, I'm thinking of going to school with you?"

Ellis: Well, I wasn't going to school *with* him. Because I was, after all, a graduate student, and he was an undergraduate student. Oh, my children, they knew I was going to school all those other years. You know, twenty-two years, that's a long stretch of their lives.

And one of the most beautiful things that happened in my early days as a graduate student was that I wrote a paper, which was pretty well devoid of quoting critics. Because when I was doing my master's down in— [*Vicki enters*]

Vanderscoff: Vicki's here.

Vicki: What do you need?²⁸

Ellis: We were discouraged from quoting critics when we wrote papers. We were encouraged to think of our own form of criticism, our own *analyse*; the French call it *analyse du texte*, textual analysis, which means looking at the text from your own perspective, from your own life experience, from your own knowledge of how other French intellectuals would look at a particular text. What would their value system be? How would they be weighing the text? What criteria would they put into place? Rather than doing a lot of quotes.

So, I wrote this paper for one of the French literature professors, who was giving the few courses that I could take towards a graduate degree. I wrote it for him, and it was quite a hefty paper, like a twenty or twenty-five-page paper—it wasn't just a little short thing. I spent a lot of time on it and worked hard on it. And he rejected it out of hand. He didn't like it because there was no criticism. It was not just this, "Oh, Anatole Peugeot Disait said blah blah blah" about this piece"—you know, quote this critic and then a critic who comes at it from a different perspective, or one of these new age-type critics, who take the text and tear it to bits completely, to where a work of art becomes so destroyed, that it's disgusting, as far as I'm concerned.

Vanderscoff: You mean like Poststructuralists?

Ellis: Exactly.

Vanderscoff: Or like people like Foucault or Derrida?

²⁸ When Vicki sees we're in the midst of it, she quietly steps out.

Ellis: Exactly, Derrida, yes. *Ridere, ridere*—“to laugh” in Italian—that’s what I always wanted to do, was to laugh at that man. To take a work of art—because that’s what a text is to me. You see, it’s a completely different approach than I was taught. I was brought up always with the idea that—and I still to this day believe, that literature is a form of art, is an artistic expression, not just a series of rational observations. For that, you can use calculus. Using words as painting tools is very dear to me. I love that idea.

Vanderscoff: And so, as you’re starting to get this education, you’re overlapping with your children’s undergraduate experiences. I just wonder, what was that like? How did you feel about sharing a campus with your children? How did they feel about it?

Ellis: Oh, it was marvelous for me to be able to share some ideas with them. And I don’t know, you’d have to ask, Vicki would know what she thought about it. [*Vicki enters again; Vanderscoff and Vicki laugh as she looks at her mom*] Vicki, because Vicki has—

Vicki: Okay, what? I heard my name?

Ellis: Well, he’s asking a very good question. How did it feel, me being a student on one level, and you being a student on the other? You know, like did we exchange ideas? Did we talk? Did we discuss? I don’t remember, to tell you the truth, if we did. I just took it for granted that you both were working hard.

Vicky: I took your class once. That was bizarre.

Ellis: Oh, I remember, you took my translation class. That’s right, yes.

Vicki: That was embarrassing. [*Vanderscoff laughs*]

Ellis: Oh yes, she's always embarrassed by me. What else is new? [*laughter*] Every child is embarrassed by his or her parents somewhere along the way.

Vicki: But you did a good job. I was actually *quite* impressed.

Ellis: Oh, that was nice of you to think that I at least knew a little bit about what I was talking! It was nice of you to say that. Duck; the compliments are flying! A compliment, imagine!

Vicki: It was really, it was a good class, a really good class.

Ellis: Yes, that was an interesting class that I got to teach. One of these, you know, you could teach-whatever-you-want things. It happened because there was a Spanish lit prof who was, for a time, actually on my thesis committee, and he was teaching a class on translation. He was very big on translation, on which I also was very big, and interested in. And he was teaching grad students, who had to be reading enough of the language to pass their qualifying exams, you know, to gain just a short acquaintance with enough of the nomenclature and the vocab to get through. They're not having a real understanding of the language or a real knowledge of it; that was not at the basis of what grad students were being asked to do. In other words, a nodding acquaintance with the material so they could pretty well, I suppose, read the criticism. I think that's the basis of it, getting back to the critics.

Vanderscoff: So, for that particular class, we just heard that opinion from Vicki's side. What was your experience of teaching one of your children? It's different, right, sharing a house versus sharing a classroom?

Ellis: Well, I have even a better example— You want to hear a better experience than that? See if you can focus your great imaginative powers, and imagine that you are a professor. You're teaching a class. And it's a class in adult ed. And sitting in the class is your very own mother. And this very own mother keeps raising, lifting her hand—or not even, but is coming out with the answers, not giving another person a chance. [*laughs*] You're the professor. You ask a question. And this person, your mother, is supplying the answers, because she's very sharp, and she knows, she understands it, and she's getting the answers and keeping everyone— And you have to say to this person—because believe it or not, this event happened in my class—

Vanderscoff: You're suggesting this isn't fiction. [*laughs*]

Ellis: My mother came to my class. I was earning, not an enormous salary, as a TA. And I had my tuition to pay, and I had Vicki's tuition to pay, while she was here as a student. So, I went downtown and I found out about adult education. There was no French being offered in adult education. They were teaching English, ESL, English as a second language, and they were giving some Spanish, rudimentary Spanish. But there was no French. So, I instituted French in the Santa Cruz city school adult ed program in the seventies while I was a grad student, to try and make some extra money.

My mother used to want to escape the rigors of New York winters in February. So, every year, she would come out here and spend the month of February—pretty much February, and sometimes March—sometimes both months. I believe I told you yesterday about my mother, the alderman, whom I told that she should run for office because she knew everyone and they'd all vote for her.

Vanderscoff: She was “the alderman,” you said.

Ellis: Yes, she knew everybody. And so, she would come to visit—and here I was, giving these classes. I said, “Come on, Mom. Come on and sit in on the class and maybe you’ll like it.” She had never studied French. But she was such a quick study that she really picked it up very rapidly. And she would sit there. In that class, I would have to say, “Françoise”—I turned her name from Frances into Françoise—“Françoise, *s’il-vous-plaît*,” “please, Frances,” “*Laissez parler les autres étudiants*,” “let the other students speak.” [laughter] To your mother! Because you said “embarrassed”—yes, of course she was embarrassed because I was the teacher. But as your student, that’s really a strange role to see your mother in. [laughter]

So, getting back to that translation class, let me tell you what—that was a really interesting class that Gabe Berns, the Spanish Lit prof imagined, and put into effect. It was for grad students for the reading exams, to have a translation class. Because that’s the essence of what their reading exam is, to translate a passage, as I say, probably drawn from criticism. And I had students in there who were in all of the disciplines—they were in the sciences, they were in the humanities, they were in the social sciences—who were going to sit the French exam and needed to have some of this nomenclature, particularly they needed the language that unified the technical verbiage which they might have to learn. You know, certain vocabulary for—I did not have the means to impart to this whole array of graduate students from all these different disciplines, I could not supply them with an array of all the vocabulary they might be needing in French. But if they were in the sciences, the chances were that there would be cognates, or there would be English technical terms that they’d be facing

themselves. It was the connective words that they needed: idioms, and verb structures and things of that nature.

Vanderscoff: In the sciences, you're saying they'd run into Latin cognates and so on.

Ellis: Yes, exactly, the Latin cognates would very often just be sufficient for them. So that was a really interesting class to plan. And Vicki was in it because she was taking Japanese. She did a language studies major, with Japanese as the major part of it. And so, she had to do quite an extensive translation—I think she was assigned part of a short story—I don't remember how many pages, but it was at least ten or twelve pages in Japanese. She had to do a translation of that as part of her major requirements.

Each of the majors in language studies, each of the languages had their own rules as to what they required for the degree, for what their requirements were to be fulfilled. Japanese had a large portion of translation, or an important portion of the work was translation. And that was, of course, only for the BA. So, Vicki was essentially then taking an upper-division graduate course when she took that translation course. So that's why she has to tell you how it was embarrassing, especially given the instructor. *[laughs]*

Vanderscoff: So that takes us—

Ellis: But at least I did not have to chastise her the way I did my mother, to "Be quiet, let someone else answer, please!" *[laughs]* Okay.

Vanderscoff: So, I think this is a decent place to pause, because we've come into this place where you're here at Santa Cruz; your family's here at Santa Cruz. And then next time, I have

more questions about your early impressions and your teaching and your classes, and picking up on a couple of things you said here. But an hour and a half in, I wonder if this is a good place to pause. Does that sound good to you?

Ellis: Oh, yes. In fact, it's almost four o'clock—it's almost two hours. We did it again. Or you did it again, sitting there patiently listening.

Vanderscoff: Happily listening.

Ellis: I have to give you a big prize for being a good listener.

Vanderscoff: I will, yes—

Ellis: I think that there's no question about you being able to put that on your CV: "specializes in listening." Except you need to have people lying on a couch, so you can charge them, what, \$200 an hour?

Vanderscoff: Oh, I know, I just need to go to school a little bit longer, you know? *[laughter]*
But that's good. I'll put you down as a reference. *[laughs]*

Ellis: My dear colleague, Faye, you know, our distinguished professor of psychology—she is such a marvelous human being, in case you didn't perceive that. I want to put that in the historic realms of this procedure, the fact that Faye Crosby has been one of the highlights of my experience, which is up almost for half a century on this campus. You know, '71 to '20, what is that? That's nine—

Vanderscoff: You're coming up on forty-nine years, and soon fifty.

Ellis: Forty-nine years. So, I might—

Vanderscoff: You'll have to hold some festivities.

Ellis: —if I'm still alive, depends on what this health business does for me now. I don't know, I'm supposed to go and have some tests, new tests coming up. So, we'll see what the next week or so brings. I don't know.

Vanderscoff: We'll all be sending good support. And we'll all be celebrating for your fiftieth here in town. I'll come back—I'll come visit.

Ellis: I don't know, Cameron. I don't know.

Vanderscoff: New York isn't so far.

Ellis: I would really like this May to be able to celebrate at least partially, or in a very small part, the twentieth year of the Playhouse.

Vanderscoff: Oh, I'm sure you shall.

Ellis: Well, I'm not sure that I'll be up for it physically. I hope I am, but we'll see. I'll do my best. That will be a goal.

Vanderscoff: Well, for now, I'll turn this off, Miriam.

Ellis: Yes, please do, yes.

[When the recorder turns on, Miriam has begun speaking about her inspirations, focusing on professor of psychology and former Cowell provost Faye Crosby]

Ellis: —colossus who overshadows every one of the others is our Faye Crosby, because she is a *ne plus ultra*, a *sine qua non*, whatever you want. She's a *sui generis*, if you prefer that one, or just plain one-of-a-kind, and an absolutely priceless part of my life in so many, many ways. In fact, I was gushing in my usual hyperbolic, over-the-top, you know—I think you got that by now—way, [laughter] and telling her, “You're not a friend anymore. Sorry, you're just part of the family, if you like it or not.” [laughs] She is just such—I don't know if you know, but the word for “soul” in French comes very directly from the Latin. And it is *âme*, as in *alma*—you know the idea, like in the word *amicale*, or “amiable” in English. We've used it in many ways, the “ami” kind of prefix, or even stem. And so, for me, a friend really is part of whatever this thing is, this intangible soul business, whatever the essence—I think it's pretty much a matter of the essence of one's being, very close to that, whatever that is. And she is, I call her une *amie de coeur*, a part of my heart, in a sense, which is based on that innate essence. And speaking of that warm feeling, I'd also like to send in memoriam, a very warm accolade to Faye's remarkable father, Bob Newman, who was part of the Cowell provost household during her tenure. What a great privilege it was for all of us who got to know this splendid gentleman. Everyone, students, staff, faculty—he brought so much charm and wit to every function and to every conversation, and endeared himself to all of us. He was a strong supporter of the Playhouse and even sponsored one of our programs. So, the accolade for Faye and Bob is twofold in its strength—what a distinguished duo. They truly illustrate the old observation that “The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.” You have much to be proud of, *chère Faye*.

Are we going in some kind of chronology at this point that you want to respect?

Vanderscoff: Yes, I was going to pick up today in the seventies, picking up again with your doctoral years, which is roughly where we left off.

Graduate Work with Professor Joseph Silverman

Ellis: Okay, in my doctoral years, another person who helped me tremendously in pragmatic and in psychological and in emotional ways was Joe Silverman, Joseph H. Silverman, who was one of the leading Hispanists in the world, in terms of Peninsular literature, Hispanic literature. He was world-renowned for many of his endeavors. I was the last graduate student whose thesis he directed.

And I don't know if you got—I think you did get the message that when I came here, the French lit and the Spanish lit graduate program were pretty much nonexistent.

Vanderscoff: How many fellow students did you have?

Ellis: In the literature graduate group, yes, a handful. And none, zero, with whom I could really interact on the level of the way I had interacted at Valley State with a host—there was a large, large cadre of M.A. graduate students in literature, in both French and Spanish literatures. And being able to exchange ideas, to hone ideas, to exchange experience and bits of trivia and bits of really important data, as well, with fellow sufferers was just an enormously important part of the graduate program there. Because it was an established program, and here it was just baby steps, just beginning.

This was not initially designed to be a graduate campus. It was designed to be an undergraduate campus. That was its big draw for so many students: undergrad education.

That's why we lecturers had a heyday working very, very closely with our students. We lecturers had twice the workload of most of the ladder faculty in those days. We in language were required to teach eight courses per year, whereas people on the ladder usually teach four. And we had there, for two quarters of the three, dedicated to teaching three classes, which is almost inhuman, in the days when we have large enrollments. And we had all of the attendant busywork that goes with language acquisition and training, and that is: written exercises, compositions, essays, a lot of written work that demands very close attention and correction and overseeing.

So, there was a never-ending life of correcting students' papers, of course, in addition to all the hours in the classrooms and all of the accessory things that we did. In French, for example, we had the French theater program project going all of those years. But we also had things like a French fair. One day of the year we would devote to out-of-the-classroom experiences, complementary cultural experiences, whereby we did music, we did theater, we did food, we did perhaps film, we did some theater presentation, we did lectures by some of our French faculty to come in and talk about things that they relished and enjoyed studying outside of—in other words, I suppose they call it today applied linguistics, in the sense of using some kind of a pragmatic illustration of ways to use the language other than just *qua lingua*, right? I told you a long time ago, I consider language to be to open so many worlds, so many possibilities.

So, we had the *Foire française*, the French Fair. And we would have, because one of our marvelous faculty members, Hervé Le Mansec—by the way, the French group in those days was very closely allied, very collegial, very complementary in interests and in acumen. We

loved sharing things together, working together outside of the classroom, as well as inside the classroom. I found out, through reporting from colleagues of different sorts, that it's not always the case in every department that people are extremely collegial in and out of the classroom. And in fact, there seems to be a great deal of competition that is rife, in terms of what the quote, "norm," unquote is.

Narrative Evaluations Instead of Grades

But in those days, I think the very fact that there were no grades established a very different milieu, not only for the students, but took off that sharp edge of competitiveness which seems to be very much at the heart of many entities, be they in academe, or in business, or in whatever other professional aspect you care to mention. There was this sense of camaraderie in the company of friends—again, to return to that wonderful quote that we have at Cowell, "the pursuit of knowledge in the company of friends"—and the joy that comes from that. It does add a tremendous element of positive reinforcement and cooperation and well-being to what is, essentially, or can be a very difficult situation.

Many of our faculty lived far away and had a long commute to get to Santa Cruz, like from the Bay or the Palo Alto area or places like that, for many reasons—either they had a family, or to find housing was too expensive locally, as every student, of course, also knew. So, they had the long commute sometimes.

And the three-day-a-week—at one point, actually, for quite a while, we had a four-day week. We were teaching not only Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, but also there was, I believe there was either Tuesday or Thursday—I don't remember now which one it was. So, we had

sometimes clashes with the Tuesday-Thursday schedules. We had to juggle our classes around to be able to fit into that kind of split hourly scheduling. And finding space on campus, even in those early days, was not always that simple to do—and especially with our four days. Then we finally went to a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule, which made things a lot easier from very many standpoints. Not to mention from the students' standpoint, having to fit that extra day in when they were also on a Tuesday-Thursday regimen.

And then we had the advent of grades, which came along, I believe, was it in—I don't know anymore, if it was in the eighties?

Vanderscoff: Right, grades came in gradually over the years. So, when you were a student here, you had no grades whatsoever—is that correct?

Ellis: As a graduate student, no, I think we did. Did they give us grades? I believe we did get some kind of assessment. Of course, we had those narrative evals, which told the whole story—really, a long story and a complex story.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, before we get into the advent of grading, I wonder could you say a little bit about the narrative evaluations, since you experienced them both as a student and then also as an instructor?

Ellis: Oh, yes. We all spent hours and hours on those. When the computer came in, people started to use certain formats, sort of like *grosso modo* and then fill in the details. I never quite did that. I suppose I lapsed into some kind of a format that was my own way, was primarily doing my best to find positive things to say about the students who worked hard

and deserved to have good support from that standpoint, and then mentioning things, in as diplomatic a way as possible, that needed some more attention.

We had large classes. They were pretty large for language. Language classes were theoretically optimal if there were about fifteen in the population, so that one could really lavish a great deal of personal attention on each student, which is extremely important in this kind of very personal rhythm to acquire another mode of expression not only structurally, but also phonetically, just hearing, just the comprehension. Because the categories of expertise that we look at are—of course, there's the oral fluency, and there's the oral comprehension. Those two, which are quite different and demand different talents and different modes of learning and different areas of learning in the brain in how to replicate the sounds and the structures.

A Brief French Lesson

For example, French does demand the mastery of what is called the IPA, the International Phonetic Alphabet, whereby you learn from symbols—you learn sounds. I even went as far, with a colleague, as to devise a system which didn't get very far. It was in the nascent days of the computer and I was trying to get some kind of a program with David Orlando—one of my very, very beloved colleagues in French—it was called "French Phonetics for Americans," to show that we all have the same means, physically, of expression: a tongue and teeth and a mouth, and air to project the sounds, and vocal cords, and ears to hear and so on. The French don't come with any extra anything, but they do make some different sounds that we also really *do* make, to some extent.

There are, for example, four so-called nasal vowels, which means you take a vowel that's used in English, like "aah," and you put a nasalization—you put a little "en" kind of twang at the end of it, so you have [*contrasting*] "aah, aahn."²⁹ "Put the book 'aahn' the table." And there's the sound "aahn" in French. Easy enough to almost make the equivalent in English, if you think about the purity of the vowel as "aah" and just put a little twang on it. As I'm saying, "Put the book 'aahn' the table," and you get the "aahn," which is written either "a-n" or "e-n" in French. And so, there's one of the sounds, "aahn."

And then there's—well, I'll start with the little catchphrase that's used, "uhhn," "*bon*," "*vin*," "*blanc*." "uhhn," "uhhn," "uhhn"— [*a teacherly pause as Ellis looks at Vanderscoff and waits for him to participate*] The French spelling for this "nasal" vowel is "un" meaning "a," "or "an," or "one."

Vanderscoff: [*with noticeably less confidence*] Ahhn.

Ellis: [*Modeling the correct pronunciation*] No, that's another vowel that's nasalized. More like: "Can" you help me? [*with Vanderscoff repeating "uhhn" and tweaking pronunciation with each attempt, punctuating Ellis' correctly pronounced series of examples*] Uhhn, uhhn, uhhn, uhhn. Think of English "up," with a nasal lilt at the end, or "umpire." "There's "un" [*pronounced like uhhn*"] which means one. Uhhn, uhhn. "He came 'uh'-p,"—up, up— "the stairs." [*emphasizing the "uh" sound in "up" to indicate the similarity and offer another model*] Uhhn, uhhn, uhhn. [*Vanderscoff continues to try to emulate her pronunciation*]

²⁹ "Aahn" is spoken in a more Francophone style, with a pronounced "h" and a soft "n," a little like the word "en" in French. All renderings in this section are my best (inexpert) effort at phonetic spellings of Miriam's vowel sounds—Cameron Vanderscoff.

Okay, [*new sound*] “oh”—do you “ow-n” that book?³⁰

Vanderscoff: [*Copying*] Oh.

Ellis: Uhn; *bon*, good; *vin*, wine; *blanc*. A good wine white [*Emphasizing the variances in the core vowel sounds in bon, vin, and blanc*]

Vanderscoff: [*Copying*] Aah, aahn, aah—creating the sound of pon-der, when we want the sound of “un-der.” That’s why we use the book ON the table for imitating the sound of “enfant.” But “un” is closer to “umbrella” or “up”. “Un bon vin blanc.”

Ellis: Aahn. Those are the four French nasalized vowel sounds. They’re not that difficult to fabricate—

Vanderscoff: [*laughs*] If you have a more talented student than me.

Ellis: —if you look for something similar in English that you’ve already conquered, like those four words, right? “The book is *on* the table.” “Do you *own* that car?” “Oh,” “aahn.” Aahn, Aahn—“Cah,” [as in] “*Ca*-n you go with me this evening?” *Can*, right? Ah, ah. *Intéressant, imbécile, impossible*—there’s the French sound “aahn.”³¹ Not that difficult, is it, aahn, if you start from the point of something that you know, which is the idea of aahn, aahn.

And then, so we’ve got: under, own, can—*yonder-each with varying vowel inflection*]. “Don’t put your feet *on* my table, please,” aahn. So, there we are. Is that so hard? Those are four difficult sounds for Americans, for English speakers, usually, because we don’t nasalize

³⁰ “Oh” is again spoken with French-style ending, with “own” pronounced to emphasize a very French-sounding “oh.”

³¹ In this case, the “aahn” sound coming as the “I” at the beginning of each of the three previous words.

vowels generally. Or if we do, we don't realize we're nasalizing them. Because if you say aahn, on the table, there's a nasalization going on just right there, on the way to getting the "n" with your tongue. But on the way, you are tip-toeing through the fields of nasalization.

Vanderscoff: And so, thinking about it that way and explaining it that way, is that something that you already brought with you to UCSC? Or is that something that developed over your time here?

Ellis: What, an approach to phonetics, you mean, for Americans?

Vanderscoff: Yes, how to explain this to new American learners. Was that a pedagogical thing that you brought with you here? Or is that something—

Ellis: No. Well, I started a long time ago because of the work in the French theater, of course—by being really, really demanding and tough, or whatever pejorative you want to use, rigorous, or pain in the neck, about making Anglo speakers understand that the acquisition of a decent, passable, understandable to a French-speaking person—and acceptable to that person—accent by an Anglo speaker is not an impossibility. It's not that difficult. There are not that many constraints. [*phone rings*] From whom?

Vanderscoff: [*Listening to the vocal caller ID*] Dominican Hospital.

Ellis: Oh, good. I've been waiting for them to call me.

Vanderscoff: I'm going to put this on pause. [*recorder paused; record resumes after the phone call as Miriam continues the previous subject*]

Ellis: We could get Americans to speak well enough if they had the tools, if they just knew how to approach what the—A, what are the differences in the way we make noises and the way the French do? And then, how do you manufacture those differences? Where do you keep your means of communication? What positions and so forth? So, I devised a group of crazy exercises, you know, like “Sister Susie sells seashells on the seashore?” Well, I did that, for example, with different elements of French phonetic challenges.

So, for example, softening the “t’s” and the “d’s.” [*demonstrating*] *La tante Toinette tournait la tête en dandinant dans la rue d’Antin*—you know, dumb, silly. They don’t make any sense. Aunt Toinette turned her head while she was dawdling down Dantin Street. But they use the *d’s* and the *t’s*. Or *Richard et Robert*. Now, “r” is another sound that’s hard for most Americans to make, the Parisian “r,” which lies in your throat. And so, I invented something, and my long-suffering cherished colleague, David, laughed his head off over it. Because I told the students, “What happens if the phone rings at two in the morning, and some drunken voice gets on there and [*breathing heavily, throatily*] starts to breathe heavily into the phone with the mouth open?” [*demonstrates again*] Do you see where that sound is coming from? Deep in the throat, isn’t it?

And so, I got them all to just do a little deep breathing like that in the class. And David thought, “Oh, what a thing to tell!” He was just a little taken aback that I used such a kind of potentially shocking example— [*laughter*]

Vanderscoff: So, when you talk about breathing techniques, to me, that sounds like something that’s more familiar to the theater than maybe it is to language work. So, I’m thinking about some of your different involvements.

Ellis: Yes, of course, of course! Because if you just go [*breathes*], that is exactly where you also place the [*making a rasping, slightly guttural "H" sound*] in German. That is also where you place the *khorosho*³² in Russian, by the way, right down here. So, it's not an "r" that's made with the lips, or nonexistent, like it is in English, pretty much. "Do you really mean it?" "Er," "really?" Where is that "r," our American "r"? [*emphasizing the softer, thinner, far less emphatic American "r," which sounds suddenly much less substantial*] Oh, never mind.

So, we've got the "r." We've got the vowels that I mentioned to you, those four nasals. And we have one more little semi- or demi-vowel, and that is the [*quick and emphatic, with Vanderscoff trying to repeat*] "*emphasizing the sound*] *Tu, Tu as dû, je ne l'ai pas vu, l'as-tu vu*—right? Okay, so now, how do you make that sound? That sounds like a really hard sound to make. Okay, it's not—it's easy.

Anyway, so there we are. Really, there's not a lot to say: there' are the four vowels; there's the "r"; there's the softening of the "t's" and the "d's" so that you don't explode them— [*with comically sharp, spitting t's*] "*He took Dorothy to the toy store*" or whatever. I'm exploding just to exaggerate. But that's the idea: no explosions with the "t's" and the "d's," with the dentals. [*softly*] *Du du du, tu tu tu*—very soft. Same thing in Italian. Same thing in Spanish. If you get it for one of the Romance languages, you're going to have it for all three or four of them. So that's a nice plus.

Vanderscoff: So—

³² Emphasis on first consonant, "Kho," which utilizes a similar sound.

Ellis: Anyway, so I had devised this series of exercises, these nonsense exercises. I use them in my theater classes now very often to help those who are still having problems with those sorts of little minutiae, it gives them a chance to work on each detail.

So anyway, to conquer the basic sounds of this other language that you are trying to imitate, to mimic, to recreate in your own vision, is not an impossible task. But it just very often is ignored, particularly, if I may say—not to be negative, or in a pejorative way—but it often happens that a native speaker does not realize these things in the same way that a new speaker, an acquired language speaker, has had to learn them, especially from the American English point of view.

So, David Orlando and I worked on this “Phonetics for Americans.” And we were going to show, “Here are two Americans who have managed to become proficient in the pronunciation,” to the point where people frequently, or a lot of French people, asked where David came from and where I came from, when each of us was in France. They used to ask us, and they were surprised that we were *Américains*. But it can be done.

Life as a Graduate Student at UCSC

Vanderscoff: So that gives us a window into some of your pedagogy and some of your teaching. But of course, in your earliest years at UCSC, in addition to teaching, you’re also a student yourself. I wanted to go back to the early years of your doctorate. Could you just talk a little bit about, what was your world at that time? Where were you living? Where were you going? What was the world of a graduate student in the humanities?

Ellis: Well, I lived, actually, in the student apartments for the first year or so, until I managed to find a house to rent with another student and with Vicki—with actually, two students. Because the other student was also at UC, but Vicki was still finishing high school. So, the three of us rented a house not far from campus, also here on the West Side. [*indicating the direction*] I'm showing you where it is, more or less, down there. That was nice that we were close by. We could afford the rent because we split it up three ways, so that was good. But housing was always a difficult problem, even in those days, for students here, yes.

If you look at my CV, you'll see that I was TA'ing not only for theater arts, as well as for language, but I was also doing TA work for Merrill College. I was still at Merrill in those early, early days, '74, '75. [*looking at her CV*] And then actually in '73 I added classes in adult education at night to my schedule to try and make ends meet, because I was paying two tuitions, mine and Vicki's. By then, she had become a student, too.

Vanderscoff: So, what were the financial challenges and the financial support offered to a humanities graduate student at that time [*crosstalk*]?

Ellis: I was a TA [so] whatever TA's made, which was not much, I'll tell you. Then I became a TA in theater arts for here and there. And then at the music board I was given the acting instructor title—it was still TAing—and I did that from '75 to '77. And I knew someone who was involved with College Eight, which had recently been formed, and in '75 through '79, I became an academic advisor there. So I was seeing students, helping them plan their programs and their majors and all of that sort of thing.

Vanderscoff: And given that Santa Cruz was founded on the college system, but the college system was for undergraduate students, what was Merrill like in those days? And what relevance did the Merrill community have to your time as a grad student?

Ellis: I worked with the provost on a committee to run certain things at Merrill—I don't remember exactly what we covered, you know, if questions came up about a student or about a program or about whatever. So, I was on a committee to advise—John Isbister was his name. He was a lovely person and the provost of Merrill. Before I came down to Cowell, I worked with him at Merrill.

See, everything was so flexible, Cameron, in those days, if you were willing and if you had the time and energy to put into all of these different possible things that were going on— The university was being formed. It was still really in a, let's say just a post-nascent stage. It was just in its infancy. If you were truly interested in being involved, you could be. You could do so many things. And what they did was, it was like the Montessori method, where you used the capacities, the traits, the talents, the interests, the motivations of the individual to go wherever they would like to explore, to share their interests, to share their *joie de vie* about different aspects of life—cultural or social or academic—it didn't matter.

What attracted me was the openness, the possibilities, the fertility of the environment, if you will—the absolute infinite, the feeling of infinite possibilities of what you could do if you really wanted to, if you had the motivation and if you had the interest in sharing and in cooperating with others, in dealing with others, in complementing others, working together, doing things as a team. That was the beauty of it. It wasn't restrictive.

Vanderscoff: And so, what did that mean to you? What would be some examples of how that permission impacted you as, say, a graduate student?

Ellis: Oh, well, I remember I gave a couple of lectures on opera just because I loved opera so much. I went over to College Five. I can remember giving a couple of lectures over there about the new crop of marvelous singers. It was a golden age of artists at the Met in those days. We had Joan Sutherland. We had Pavarotti. We had Marilyn Horne. Those three were prime superstars who were worth learning about and sharing their greatness with the younger students.

I would say, "I'd really love to talk a little bit about the opera scene these days." So, "Oh sure, why don't you come and give us some talks?" So, I went and gave them some talks. All I needed was a little space and some chairs and some flyers or something we could put out on a ditto machine. And we did that, announcing that we're going to have this going on. We did it, just because it was there to do—that kind of thing.

Vanderscoff: So, if you have this freedom to give talks about what you want to do, and then also the opportunity to TA across three or four different boards, what sort of structural expectations were there for you as a graduate student? Was there a normative time to degree, like—?

Ellis: Well, I was taking classes. I was taking upper-division classes, graduate level—there were very few of those. But they used upper-division classes, in some instances. You had to earn X number of units in order to then present yourself to be accepted into the doctoral program. I already had the master's, but to go past that and to be considered worthy of

having oral comps, that sort of thing, and getting a thesis subject, finding a thesis director. You know, all the things that grad students have to do to become truly grad students.

So, I did the coursework. I wrote it down here somewhere, the years that I did the coursework, education. [*reading from CV*] Coursework I said was from "'71 to '75," yeah. Then I started with the actual writing on the thesis, and that took me four years.

Vanderscoff: And I have some questions about that thesis—

Ellis: Oh, because you saw the thesis itself.

Vanderscoff: Yes, I read it up at the McHenry Library. But before we get into that, I'm curious, how did you fit into this world? What was your experience as a female re-entry student?

Ellis: Very lonely, to put it into two words. Because as I started to tell you before, I really didn't have fellow graduate students. There were maybe two or three who were—I think there were two who were doing French, but nobody was doing French and Spanish. I was the only one trying to do both of those. So, I was taking both French lit and Spanish lit classes, upper-division ones.

Then I started to become more acquainted with Joe Silverman. And I was anxiously looking around for a dissertation subject. About nine-tenths of the pursuit of a PhD is trying to find what would be a subject that, A, has not been done yet—mostly by the Germans; they have done just about anything you can think of. And B, would it be possible for me to do it? So that's how I ended up not doing it in French, but rather doing it in Spanish, because I found

that working with Joe was really wonderful, really rewarding. We were very compatible, *simpático, simpáticos*, in our approach to the whole field of literature.

And the fact that I had already been through the master's to such a degree, and had acquired a rather wide background, because I had to have all of the centuries in French literature for the master's. That starts with the Middle Ages and goes up until the twentieth century. So that's what I did for my master's down at Northridge.

Vanderscoff: And were there any accommodations in place for re-entry students then, like there are now?

Ellis: Not really, no. There were the Married Students' Apartments, to which we had access. Which was wonderful, because it was not like living in a dorm. We had our own little apartment over there by the west entrance, that's where they are. I had Vicki with me, as well. She stayed with me. At first, we stayed—for that year or so, we lived in this house I told you about. But that got to be too expensive. So, I managed to find a place on campus. G16 was our apartment.

Vanderscoff: At what was then Married Student Housing?

Ellis: Married Student Housing, yes. And a neighbor was one of my dear colleagues in French, Gildas Hamel, who ended up teaching not only French, but Latin as well, because he's so well-rounded. He's one of the towering intellectuals on this campus. His area of deepest interest is the pre-biblical era, the Roman era in Palestine, and what the culture was like. He's written some very important books on that time period and the modes of living and all different facets of life.

Vanderscoff: So, I wonder, what was it like living on campus in those days? What was that experience?

Ellis: It was wonderful to be so close to the library. That was marvelous. Within walking distance, I could just be at the library. I spent a lot of time there. Not only for my own work, but because I became a research assistant for Joe Silverman. So, I would do a lot of prepping work, because he was always working on something exciting. I did that as a side thing, aside from doing my own reading and prepping.

Vanderscoff: I wonder what your experience was as a re-entry student, what it was like going to school alongside people who maybe had gone directly into their PhD out of their undergrad. What was that experience like for you, being a re-entry student?

Ellis: Well, I was older. I was this old lady they didn't know much what to do with, because the re-entry business was also in its infancy. I never did tell you that one of the reasons—you asked me the other day about, do I remember a moment when I decided to go back to school? One of the things I thought I would like to get the doctorate for was so that I could establish—this was a real dream which never went anywhere, because they beat me to it, in a way—I thought I would love to establish some kind of a little school, or some kind of a mode of helping women over forty to go back to school to get more of an education, to improve on their education. I mean, to improve more *not* on their life education—they had plenty of that—but on their formal education, to go back and take more classes.

That was when they were just beginning the idea of the re-entry program, they called it. I'd always object, I said, "Oh, am I re-entering from outer space? Yes, I'm coming back into this cosmos from another one." [*laughter*]

In a way, that was what you were doing, from being a mother staying at home with little kids, and then suddenly, there you are—also with little kids in some ways, in many ways, you know. There were these young, brilliant minds with whom you were sitting in classes, which was also very challenging and very exciting, very rewarding. I'm a great believer in the mixing of ages for learning in the same environment, because one feeds the other. There're so many symbiotic possibilities in that kind of setup, where you can use your world and life experience in some ways that the others can't. And yet they can bring all of their energy and their fresh perspectives and the newness and the excitement of discovery, all of the things that young people can bring that more jaded souls have perhaps relinquished by a certain time in their lives.

Vanderscoff: So, reflecting back on your own experience and thinking about that hypothetical school, what sort of advice would you give female re-entry students?

Ellis: The sort of advice I would give them is to have as much patience as possible with their own level of production, with their own talents. And not exaggerate them, but also don't belittle them. You have more talents than you probably realize. It just is a matter of learning how to apply them to perhaps challenges, rational challenges that you haven't dealt with in this way. But that doesn't mean you can't deal with them. You just have to take the time and have the patience to approach whatever the challenge is, and do it with as much confidence as you can muster that you'll be able to do it. And give it as much attention and as much time

as it needs. That may be very difficult. Your time might be very limited, and your energy level, too. But you have to have patience. Patience is really a very important element in going back to the books.

And, what helped me a great deal, Cameron, was that I was, at that period, I think it was during the years—I don't know, I think I stopped doing adult ed in '79, when I was busy with Ionesco. But I did do, [*reading from CV*] here I put '73 to '79 I worked in adult ed. That gave me a tremendous boost, because I saw recall and how encouraging and vitalizing that can be. I saw students come back to classes in their eighties, who had not studied French for oodles of time. And the recall, after a few weeks, was very energizing and very encouraging to them, as if they had re-found an old treasure that was lying fallow somewhere hidden away, about which they had completely forgotten.

So, I really got energy both from the young people on campus with whom I was teaching, at a certain level and certain rhythm and with certain expectations and all of that.

And at the same time, having this cadre of older people coming back to learn—maybe they're not as capable of grasping as quickly and as broadly as the younger minds, but the process of recall and the feeling of re-owning something that once was yours—repossession in a sense—gave them confidence and gave them the will to polish and to hone and to grasp more, and to add to their newly re-discovered store of memory.

So that was kind of a great complementary justification for all the efforts that I was putting forth. Because I remember that it was very tiring, being on campus all day and doing all my teaching and everything I was doing on campus, and then somehow finding the energy to go,

because we met from seven to ten at night, after all that. I don't know how I did it, but I was much younger. And I found the energy.

Vanderscoff: And we talked about this a little bit last time, but I wonder if you could say just a little bit more about what your experience was of being a doctoral student at the same time that your children were at UCSC as undergraduates. Because you have these different perspectives on the campus, these different cultural angles. I'm just curious if you could say a little bit more about that experience.

Ellis: Well, Jonathan became enamored of science, even though he started out at College Five, thinking he was going to go somehow into the arts or humanities. He ended up becoming a scientist. I always tell him, "You're a poet running around there somewhere in the science rubric." But that's fine, because science demands a great deal of creative energy, too, and a great deal of imagination, to say the least. He's been living with various manifestations of dream projects for at least the last ten or twelve years, and finding ways to save the planet—you know, just small, simple objectives like that. That's Jonathan, working for NASA all those years and traveling around the world, to all of these places, giving lectures, giving TED talks, giving papers at conferences, giving classes. He has a connection with the University of Tokyo, where he went for several years and stayed for a portion of time to give classes. He has all kinds of demands on him all the time. I do not know how many countries he has visited to give papers, to give keynote talks in their conferences. A man is never a prophet in his own country, but Jonathan has accrued many international honors and invitations. He has put together a team of experts, with whom he works, who are from many, many different countries and all sorts of disciplines.

I hope now—they should be coming back. They're in China; he and his wife Susanne, have been in China since the sixth of September. They should be coming home maybe even tomorrow, or the third, Vicki's birthday. They said they'll be back on Vicki's birthday, I think. The third, when is that, Thursday?

Vanderscoff: Yes, correct.

Ellis: It would be really nice if you could meet Jonathan and Susanne. They're quite interesting people, if I do say so—but they really are.

Vanderscoff: Well, I'd love to. So, you're seeing your children bloom at this institution while you're pursuing your own doctorate. And I'm just wondering, how are you feeling? You're a mother. You're a student. You have many different relationships to UCSC. And maybe I'm asking this myself—my mother went to UCSC, so maybe I'm asking this as a second gen UCSC student.

Ellis: Your mother went to UCSC?

Vanderscoff: Yes. My aunt as well, yes.

Ellis: Oh, while you were a student here?

Vanderscoff: No, she went earlier. But I'm interested in that multi-generational UCSC experience.

Ellis: Well, I certainly did my best to encourage my children to get the most out of the flexibility and out of the endless possibilities that, were they to really, really look for them or conjure them up within themselves, they could follow them here. I don't know if you know,

but Vicki is a very good musician. She's got an excellent ear. And when I was team-teaching the UCSC Opera Workshop, she was in several of the shows that I produced and directed, And, with her guitarist colleague, Sandy Brassard, who's a professional musician, she performs gigs in the Bay area, where they offer programs in various venues for special events. They have a very eclectic repertoire; in classical and popular music, including works in many languages and folk pieces. They tailor their performances to suit the tastes of their audiences. Vicki plays flute and saxophone and sings, and they have made several CD's, which included some of their original works. They have composed over thirty songs, one of which is devoted to our garden here.

Jonathan went his way in marine biology, for starters, and then he got into all kinds of other science, and then he went to Scripps for his doctorate, from here. He certainly can tell you much more about his career. And then, while he was at NASA-Ames, he went into nanotechnology, which was very important to the space program, I assume.

Vanderscoff: So clearly, UCSC was this remarkable ground for different members of your family. This question is more big-picture, but in those years when you first arrive in the seventies, UCSC is going through some changes. When you come there, it's still Chancellor Dean McHenry, the founding chancellor. And then you have Chancellor Christensen, who's only in there for a year and a half and then out. And then Chancellor Sinsheimer, and Chancellor Sinsheimer comes in and does this thing which is called "reorganization." That comes up sometimes in these interviews. So, I just wonder—

Ellis: Yeah, but all of that was way above me. It didn't touch me personally, because we in the lectureship category, we were assigned the title of "temporary academic staff," I believe,

something like that. We were never even considered—we were never even given the title of “faculty,” by the way. It’s sort of interesting. And the idea of “temporary” is really one that, shall we say, grates just a teeny bit? From the standpoint that it will be almost fifty, forty-nine years now, that I’ve been associated with the campus.

But all of this remarkable freedom that there was to pick and choose and devise and create and imagine—all of that was just the atmosphere. I would like it very much—I think it would be rewarding to you, too—to get Jonathan’s point of view, from his long-range view, now that he’s been through all that he’s been through, about what UC was like then. Because he was a student in those days as well.

Vanderscoff: Right. And you’re saying that these big picture—because what reorganization functionally did is it took tenure decisions, basically, and moved them solidly into the boards. And it was a part of the strengthening of the boards. But you’re saying, as far as how that would have impacted you as a graduate student or as a lecturer, that was—

Ellis: That didn’t impact me personally that I can remember, as a lecturer. Undoubtedly, there were things that I was not cognizant of, because I am, as you may have noticed by now, typically I’m *dans la lune*, on the moon a lot. [*laughs*] Not seeing what’s right in front of my nose, you know, too busy with other things, I suppose.

The person who would really know a lot about this is David Orlando, my dear colleague. Because he was always, very much administratively oriented and knowledgeable. He became a quasi-chair of language, of the program—because we were called a program then. He had the wonderful ability and tactful and diplomatic spirit to be able to handle many, many crises

that presented themselves over the years. For instance, in humanities we went through a whole series of different people at the helm, different deans. One dean in humanities—who was very friendly and helpful to me, and who was one of those stellar people that I told you stands out over all these years as a positive reinforcement and encouraging element in my personal existence—was Gary Lease, who did not get along with everyone. But nobody ever does, it seems, especially when you are in a dean’s position. But he was so kind as to help my application to the National Endowment for the Humanities, to submit this first proposal that I wrote for them. And he team-taught a newly devised course, with Judith Harris-Frisk, a German language lecturer, in both English and German when they gave me, I don’t know, what did they give me, I think it was \$200,000 for the Language Across the Curriculum projects that subsidized more than thirty new courses over several years.³³ I don’t know, did I give you any papers on that?

Vanderscoff: Yes, yes.³⁴ So you’re talking about, you came into contact with deans more—you’re talking about when you’re a lecturer and seeking grants, as opposed to being a doctoral student?

Ellis: Yes, yes, as a lecturer. No, not as a student. Let’s see what we could—[*thumbing through her papers*] Where’s the grant, all the grants? I guess that was in the nineties already.

Vanderscoff: Well, I do have some questions about that. But maybe we can loop back to that in a future session.

³³ Miriam has successfully submitted multiple grants to the NEH, including “Foreign Language in Expanded Domains” (\$120,000 plus additional partial matching funds) and Foreign Language in Context (\$122,000 plus additional partial matching funds).

³⁴ Miriam provided me with, among other resources, a copy of her detailed CV.

Ellis: Okay.

Vanderscoff: One thing is that, while we're still in the seventies, we've touched on your dissertation a few times. But I wonder if we could just dive into it for a second, if such a thing is possible.

Ellis: I did four complete translations of that entire—what is it, is it three or four acts? I've even forgotten. I think it's four acts, but maybe only three acts. So that's why it took me all those years to do the work that I did to polish it into the shape where, in '79, it was quote "finished." Because you never finish a translation—you abandon it. You say, "Okay, *basta*, next." And then a year later you go back and you say, "Oh, what rubbish. Oh, this is horrible. I'm got to change this, this, and this." [*laughs*]

That's the world of translation, because it's almost a living, organic creation. Every time you see the text, you're seeing it with different eyes, obviously, and thinking of an alternative that you assume might be better than the one you chose at that particular moment in your life. So, it's a thing in process. To me, a translation is almost like an organic essence, a plant that's growing or whatever, a creation that's growing. Until one day, you just put it to sleep and abandon it for then.

So, I have boxes of reams of paper of different versions of *La Francesilla*, to talk about it. And in the many years since then, that was one of the Lope de Vega plays that was never published, I believe. Well, certainly there was never a translation done of it. I believe a copy of my thesis resides in Madrid, in the *biblioteca* there. I believe I saw that somewhere.

Vanderscoff: How did you pick—

Ellis: Because I didn't have enough money to get it published. There was an organization that published all doctoral dissertations when I finished finally in '79. But I didn't have enough money to pay for the publication of it, so I never got it published. So, it just sits in McHenry and maybe one or two other libraries in the world. I don't even have a copy myself of the finished product, which is a shame. *[laughs]* Maybe I should go to McHenry before I die and ask them if there's a way that I can get a copy of it. I don't know, can you do that from Special Collections? I don't know.

Vanderscoff: We could write them. How did you pick *La Francesilla* in the first place to focus on, out of all the plays—

Ellis: Because again, for that, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Joe Silverman. As I mentioned way at the top, he was one of the leading Hispanists in the world, had a very, very big international reputation for his work. He specialized in the literature of the *converso*. You know, the Jews were thrown out of Spain in 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabella, unless they became *conversos*, which means "converted." They were either thrown out or killed or burnt. And so, Joe Silverman spent his life, pretty much, a good chunk of his academic—especially later academic life—working on the literature of the *conversos*, and especially the music, too, with great emphasis. He would go around to small enclaves of *conversos* that he met in the world or that he knew about in the world, and interview people, and get oral histories from the old ladies—ta-da! *[indicating herself; Vanderscoff laughs]* And songs, especially songs—he would capture those and put them together. So, when I was working as his research assistant, I often helped him with articles that he was writing or reports that he was doing, all of that sort of thing.

So, Joe told me, when I came to him to talk about the possibility of working with him on a thesis, he told me, “Well, I have, from this old lady in Madrid,” who was the wife of some very well-known professor or academician in Spain—she had a trunk with some treasures in them. And one of the treasures was a copyist’s—not the original—but a copyist’s version of *La Francesilla*, I believe the only one that was extant. Joe went to visit her one day, and she took him into her bedroom, to this old trunk. She took it out, this copy, and she gave it to him. He wanted me to work on that. I said, “Well, I’ll try and translate it. But there won’t be time to rhyme it, because it’s written in alexandrines”—you know, rhyming alexandrines, much as Molière and Racine and Corneille did in France at the time. Because we’re talking 1595, I believe, was the date of the copy with which I worked.

It was full of blotches, ink blotches, cross-outs, not to mention horrible handwriting and old Spanish. Other than that, it was perfectly easy. [*laughter*] And dear old Joe said, “Okay, this is what you’re going to work on.” I had translated several little things here and there for Joe, because he seemed to like my translations. So, he agreed to let me do this project as a dissertation topic, which is very unusual. I think mine was the only doctoral dissertation that he oversaw that was a translation.

I did write a pretty extensive introduction. I believe if you looked at it, you saw it, running on and on about various elements of the text. You know, a little bit of an analysis, textual analysis and structure and all of that, and character interpretation and thematic inquiry.³⁵ I tried to make the thesis worthy of Joe, because he really, really was a towering *savant* in his field. If

³⁵ Miriam’s dissertation has an extensive and detailed preface diving into an analysis of the work, its significance, and her own approach to translation, among other subjects.

you have ever got some free time, Cameron, I would suggest looking up Joseph H. Silverman, Hispanic scholar. And you may find some interesting things about his life work. He published many books and many monographs and many articles and so forth.

Vanderscoff: I'm really interested in your philosophy of translation. Something that you write in *La Francesilla* is that what you strive for is a "metric translation." And saying that—this is another quote—"comedia is both poetry and play, a fact which some of his translators seem to have ignored." You say that Joe Silverman liked your translation. Could you talk a little bit more about what your approach is, and what that means: metric translation?

Ellis: Well, we're back to the musicality of the language, to the essence of stress and the essence of the particular melding of the sounds that give the language its character. But "metric" has more to do with the rhythmic impact, the cadence of the language, and trying to—

[addressing Vicki, who has just come in the front door from an appointment] with a physical therapist for post-surgery exercises.] Hello, darling. How do you feel, Vick? How did it go? Are you hurting?

Vicki: No, it's fine.

Ellis: Please just go and lie down and rest. Do you want some of the cold things? Yeah, cold helps a lot when you're in pain with the knees, and so does heat. [Vicki leaves.]

For example, when I do my aria translations, which I'm up to these days, trying to mimic in English something—let's take from *La Bohème*: "*Che gelida manina, se la lasci riscaldar.*

Cercar che giova? Al buio non si trova.” Okay, that’s the Italian. So, it’s got a rhythmic pattern, obviously, to go with the notes, right, because we’re singing. But the poetry itself has a wonderful meter. Because which comes first, the libretto—the words—or the music? Good question. Sometimes they’re both at the same time, and sometimes one before the other.

But anyway, so what have I done? I’ve done, for example, “*che gelida manina*,” “how cold your little hand is”—*che gelida manina*, which is exactly what that’s saying. “*Se la lasci riscaldar*,” “let me warm it with my own.” [*Demonstrating the syllabic cadence*] Dah-dah *dah*, dah-dah-dah dah; let-me *warm* it-with-my own. And so that gives you a little feeling of the original meter—without the notes, you see. Because I’m only doing text in my translations on my website; I’m not doing the music. If you want the music, you can go find the music easily enough.

So that’s a very good question. In opera, music and the text—to me, this is the eternal and the absolutely infinite argument which will never be resolved, and should not be resolved. Because they’re both integral parts, both the text and the music. Otherwise, I always tell people, why doesn’t it just say [*flatly, with no inflection or melody*] “la la la la la?” Or “ah ah ah ah ah?” Why do we have words? Because we’re talking about theater, and we’re talking about characters. The words reflect the character and the plot. So that’s the melding. And taking them apart and putting one above the other is not my thing. In fact, I’m always arguing about the importance of the text.

Okay, so that’s the metric side of it. So, when you get to *La Francesilla*, you know, that was the musicality of it, was one of my guidelines. And that’s why I used that term.

Vanderscoff: And so how did you wind up feeling about your dissertation? Did you have to abandon it like a translation, or did it feel complete?

Ellis: After the fourth version, yes, I did—I had to abandon it. And I told Joe, “You know, we should really put some scenes from this on stage. We should do a little version of *La Francesilla*.” I wanted him to play one of the main characters. [*laughs*] He would have been great, by the way. You know, the older main male character.

So yes, I just had to abandon it. And my husband, dear Paul, whom you see in that Memorial Photo display over there and in pictures all around the room, it was he—

Vanderscoff: Yeah, the photographs.

Ellis: —who typed the thesis for me while I was busy with the Ionescos.

More on Serving as Translator for Eugene Ionesco During his Visit to UCSC

Talk about a confluence, everything hitting the fan at the same time. The Ionescos come that very month of May, when I have to deliver the thesis to the grad office. Yes, so that was '79.

Vanderscoff: Yeah. And you told some stories about the Ionescos' visit, like this story about the steak and the fire alarm.

Ellis: [*laughs*] The fire with the steak. And then we had another fire event because the car that they lent me to drive them around with, was a very old clunker. The radiator always needed to be filled with water. You had to stand there and put water in it every day. I believe

one day or one evening or whatever, I forgot. And here I am driving it, and all of a sudden, *pshew pshew*, steam coming out of the radiator!

So, I pulled to the side on campus. And we were going to this big talk that Ionesco was going to give. There were about 700 or 800 people who came. We had to move to College Five, to the dining hall—well, it's not College Five anymore. What's it called now?

Vanderscoff: It's Porter now.

Ellis: Porter, thank you, yes, Porter, we had to move there because that was the only place where they had a dining hall that could accommodate the public. And so, I was trying to drive from Merrill over to Porter. And here's this smoke coming out of the radiator. So, I pulled over, and somehow, I got the police, and they took us to Porter with their siren blaring. So, there is another example of a fire adventure with the Ionescos.

I don't know if you know the play, *Rhinocéros*. Do you? Do you know the play?

Vanderscoff: Only a little bit, only a little bit.

Ellis: *Rhinocéros* is principally the depiction of one very ordinary individual who wants to be the holdout—he does not want to become a rhinoceros. which symbolizes the Nazi domination of much of the world. He wants to stay a human being. And he has a marvelous monologue, trying to establish what it means to be human. And it's also about how the Nazis took over otherwise logical, rational populations, scores and scores of people, who fell victim to the kind of poisonous hatred that the Nazis spread throughout all of Europe and a lot of the other parts of the world. And we still hear echoes today of the bigotry, mass hysteria, and

terror in this play—which is the unkindest, most horrible idea of all—the poison and horror of *Rhinocéros* are still present and admired by some segments of our society.

Does that sound like a farce? No, not really. No.

So, good old Hollywood interpreted another one of Ionesco's works as a farce. That is what this fellow tried to do to another of Ionesco's works [*pointing in the direction of campus*]. That's why I'm pointing to him on campus, over there. And so, on the basis of his work—I'm telling you a little bit of, this is maybe a little bit of behind-the-scenes confidentiality. I don't know, maybe you're not supposed to know this. But this fellow had applied for and received a grant from the government—I don't know from which part or what kind of grant he had received—to make his version of Ionesco's *Ce formidable bordel*. (*This tremendous mess!*)

I do remember that Ionesco was very annoyed about the interpretation. I had the job of chauffeuring him and his wife, on a Sunday morning, to this fellow's house. He lived in the boonies somewhere, I don't know. And I get lost so easily, Cameron. I can make it from here to campus, which is like five minutes away. But I'm terrible with my sense of direction. So, I was trying to find his house for quite a while. And I kept getting lost and apologizing to Ionesco and Rodica.

Finally, finally we managed to find where the place was. And I had to be the bearer of the bad news. That was a miserable job. I had to say, "Well, the maestro does not really appreciate what you—" How do you do that in a diplomatic way? How do you say, "He does not like your work?" How do you say that to somebody's face? Cameron, you've now spent all these hours listening to me go on like a broken record. And if I were to come to you and say, "I don't like

your work,” you’d be very hurt, if I did that. [*Vanderscoff laughs*] I’d have to have very good reason to do that. But how do you tell a genius, “This is what your work is about,” and he doesn’t agree with you? And is he wrong? This poor fellow—the one on campus, I mean, the theater arts person—was in a terrible situation. And I was in a very uncomfortable situation, too, if I may say. I had to be the one to say it outright, because I really couldn’t think of a nice way of saying it.

Vanderscoff: So how did it go? What happened?

Ellis: It didn’t go well. He didn’t take it very well, I’ll tell you. And then who am I, being the—you know, shoot the one who brings the news. What do you call that person?

Vanderscoff: The messenger.

Ellis: The messenger, shoot the messenger, yes. That was my role.

Vanderscoff: And meanwhile, you’re just trying to finish your dissertation. [*laughs*]

Ellis: Oh yes, meanwhile, right! No, that was Paul. Paul did that. Paul luckily was a wonderful typist.

Vanderscoff: Why do you think they asked you, in particular, to be Ionesco’s translator at that busy time in your life?

Ellis: To work with Ionesco? Because they didn’t have anybody else to be his *factotum*, to take him around. I wasn’t taking classes, and in that month of May somehow I was not teaching, because I was supposedly finishing my dissertation. I supposedly, I think, had taken the time off, or was off or whatever. Yeah, they paid me a little something for taking charge

of the Ionescos, so I could pay the rent—you know, they gave me some stipend. Because here they had invited him to come on this program I told you about, *La littérature vivante*, and he absolutely had no transportation. I mean, can you just see him standing out there, waiting for a bus, in the wilds of the campus? No way. He needed to have a driver and a car, and supposedly someone who knew their way around. But no one asked me if I knew my way around. [*laughs*] Luckily, I didn't have to pass an exam to get that job.

But they knew that I had done a certain amount of interpreting and translating and so forth, and that I could hold my own in facing the public. And they trusted me. Ionesco always used to say to his wife, "*Oh, Madame Miriam, ah, Miriam, elle est assez mûre,*" you know, that I was mature enough that I could handle whatever it was. Because he wanted to go to the doctor with her—he was sure she was dying of cancer. She had a little "kiss from the sun," I used to call those—a little mole on her lip. He was sure she was at death's door, until I finally could get an appointment to take them to a doctor, and until I could explain to him what the doctor said.

Because I *was* older. I wasn't a nineteen-year-old freshman student. I had a few years of life under my belt. So, there we are. They did appreciate my work with them. And I, to this day, if you would like to see it, I have it somewhere in my archives—I have a letter, but it's in French, from Ionesco, a letter of recommendation he was nice enough to give me. After they had gone home, we kept in touch for many years. And he sent me a lovely letter, because I was thinking, "If I finish my dissertation, maybe I'll be able to get a job"—you know that word, j-o-b— "somewhere?" So, this was going to be in my folder, in my dossier, to have a

letter from him. I thought that would look kind of nice, to have a recommendation from him. So, he was nice enough to send me that, yes.

And Rodica, as I think I told you, we were very, very quickly very friendly. People used to think that he was hen-pecked, you know, that she was just a termagant— The fact is that he told me in great confidence that he could not survive without her, because she kept his feet on the ground, and she kept him fed. She kept him clothed. She kept him out of the cold and the rain. She kept him *sur la Terre*, you know, not in his world of crises, and “the world is coming apart, and we’re not doing anything to help save it. You know, we have to be involved!” He was a great activist in his own way.

Vanderscoff: I saw that when he was at UCSC, he gave a talk on politics and art or something like this that you were the interpreter for, the translator for.

Ellis: He gave a talk on sports and politics, which was a marvelous talk. That’s the talk we went to in the police car, after the fire in the radiator—on politics and how politicians use sports to control people who would like to see them out of office and out of power. It was a wonderful talk. He went all the way back, of course, to the Roman gladiators, that sort of diversionary use, to keep the public at bay and all of the discomfort and all of the malaise under control. So that’s the way he was talking about sports.

Well, it’s a very interesting and wide-ranging subject, if you think about it a little bit. You know what happens when we have the Olympics or when we have the, what do they call them, the playoffs, the World Series, or we have these football games—

Vanderscoff: Super Bowl.

Ellis: —everybody goes crazy and the whole society stops and nobody thinks about anything else. It all kind of comes to a grinding halt. So that was his big talk, and his ability to see that and to describe it.

More on the Dissertation and Joseph Silverman

Vanderscoff: So, at the same time that you're taking Ionesco around, you're finishing your dissertation. So, can we just close the circle on your dissertation? You've decided after the fourth translation, it's good enough.

Ellis: *Basta.*

Vanderscoff: Paul has typed it up.

Ellis: Paul typed it up. He gets to the end of the enormous thing. And Ionesco and Rodica went with me. I'll never forget that, because it was kind of like a rite, R-I-T-E, you know. We went, and I handed this big packet of papers in to the graduate office. And that was just such a wonderful— Now that was either at the very end of May, or maybe they stayed another few days in June. I don't recall the details of it. But we gave it in. I don't know if the grad office put a stamp on it when they received it or whatever. [*sound of blender in kitchen*] But they did take it, and that was it. And so, it reposes. And now I think you are probably the first or the second person to look at it. [*laughs*]

Vanderscoff: Did you ever hear any feedback on it from Joe Silverman?

Ellis: I saw Joe Silverman a few hours before he passed away. I went over to his house to see him. I took his hand and kissed it—I kissed him goodbye. And he said something that I never

forgot. He mumbled something about, “Oh, and your S.G. thesis,” or something like that, He had. often called it “my “S.G.” thesis, but by that he meant “Según Gálvez,” (according to Gálvez, the copyist on whose text we were working”).

Abruptly now, however, he looked at me and said, “Oh, “S.G.,” your “Sui generis thesis [unique, one-of-a-kind], which can be positive or have a pejorative connotation. He also said, “If you publish it, you won’t make a fortune, you know.”

Because it was not full of all the critics and all of the history of—whatever. Also, because I think he had never directed a dissertation in the form of a translation. He was certainly right about it not becoming a best-seller; never have I thought of putting it out there in the world to “make me a fortune.” I would like to have a copy of it, though, in its finished form, to remind me of Joe and the joy of working with him.

Vanderscoff: But this is what he says in the last interaction that you have.

Ellis: In the last hours of his life, this is what he said. This was his goodbye gift to me. what he felt was on his tongue. *La langue bien pendue*, he just let it hang out there; what he felt, he told you.

Which comes full circle with my marvelous Susanne from Denmark, who used to say, “That’s the way the Danes are.” I don’t know if you know Danes, but they’ll tell you the way it is. “Hey, Cameron. What’s wrong with you today? You look particularly exhausted,” or whatever. If that’s what they feel you look like, they’re going to tell you that. They’re not going to say, “Oh, Cameron, you look marvelous today. Could use a little rest, but you look wonderful.” That’s not the Danish way—that’s not her way, anyway. [*laughs*]

Vanderscoff: And that wasn't Joe Silverman's way, it sounds like.

Ellis: And I learned that from Joe, too. Joe was the one who's going to tell you the way he thinks it is.

But he worked with me to the bitter end with that thesis. First of all, I was elated that he trusted me enough to let me work on it. He really was wonderful, so helpful. Just to decipher that handwriting—oh, whew! What an onerous task. Not only that, but so many ways he helped me. His wife, June, was a dear friend to me, too, in those early days on campus and she even came, wheelchair-bound, to the Palmes "chevalier" ceremony at the chancellor's home. That was the last time I saw June, a dear, sweet woman.

And Joe and I laughed at this poem—when it was all over, I said, let's see, "At times, I felt quite dopey/When dealing with dear old Lopey—" You know, that kind of doggerel. I wrote a poem about the whole thesis process and made a few jokes in it about him. He would tell these jokes which nobody understood, but which I got, because of some of the allusions that he made. In retrospect, I say muchissimas gracias to Joe. He was such an appreciated mentor, and it was my great fortune to work with him.

Did I tell you that his mother and my mother knew each other? I told you that story, about my mother, who should have been the alderman—she was friends with his mother, who told my mother, "Well, my son is a full professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz." And so, my mother said, "Well, my daughter is a graduate student at the University of California in Santa Cruz." [*laughs*] They were kind of like friendly enemies. His mother wanted to be the president of their little women's group.

Vanderscoff: Was your mother still in Brooklyn at this time?

Ellis: In New York, in Queens, yes. So, his mother and my mother knew each other for years from this organization to which they both belonged. My mother got elected president, so I guess maybe there was a little ill feeling there. But I never found out.

But I remember when mom used to come out to see me. She went with me, during my dissertation time, to the Stevenson provost's house, where I used to go often to confer with Joe.

Vanderscoff: Joe was the Stevenson provost.³⁶

Ellis: Mom went with me one day, and she said something about a word I had used. And I think it was one of my fancy words. I think mother said something like, "Why didn't you just say" whatever—you know, an easier form of the word. So, Joe said to her, "*You're* getting the doctorate!" to my mother. [*laughs*] He had such an acerbic sense of humor.

Some of the students never understood him, the lazy ones who were in his classes. A few of them got up and left. They could not take being in his class, especially if they didn't do the work, if they came to class unprepared. Yes, he was tough. He was demanding. He was rigorous. He was right. He should have been given the respect that he deserved, by their at least having read the text before the class, right? He deserved that kind of recognition.

Vanderscoff: So, Silverman is your key mentor. Were there any other professors who were significant mentors for you in your doctoral years?

³⁶ Joe Silverman was the provost of Stevenson College from 1974 to 1981.

Ellis: In French, not really. Again, it was such a brand-new concept for even having a doctoral program in French lit that they were not jumping on board to do it, and especially not with me. *[laughs]* I already told you about my concept of giving them back all of the critical palaver.

Vanderscoff: Oh, the poststructuralists, Derrida.

Ellis: Derrida—oh god, Derrida. “*Ridere*” reminds me of Italian, which means to laugh. Yeah, I would like to deride Derrida, believe me. Where is he now? I don’t think you hear very much about him anymore.

Vanderscoff: He’s still read.

Ellis: Oh, I’m sure he probably is. Oh yes, because there was a certain vogue. Because criticism goes through vogues like clothing, like style. That’s all it is. For me, it’s just all transitory. But that’s me, and that’s why I was not ye perfect grad student, to put it mildly—far from it. It’s really a wonder that they put up with me at all. Had it not been for Joe, I don’t know, I might probably still be working on my dissertation of some strange sort. But who knows?

Vanderscoff: How did your parents, did they ever express how they felt about you going to get your doctorate and pursuing this academic career?

Ellis: Who? My parents?

Vanderscoff: Yeah.

Ellis: Oh well, my parents, my dear, I lost my parents. I lost my father when I was in my thirties, so that was before I began all this academic pursuit. And I lost my mother, my dear mother. She was about ninety-nine. Her mother had also reached the nineties. But yes, Mom left us in 1984. She was still in New York, in Queens. Vicki, and Jonathan and Susanne, his wife, went to visit her when they were traveling. They saw her much more than I did, except for the times when she came out here. She came out here until she was well up in years, and then she told me, “I really can’t do it anymore.”

So that was hard. That was a big, big blow, to lose my mom. My mom was a very strong friend. She was my friend as much as my mother, even maybe more in some ways, my dear friend. Very open-minded, very broad-minded—she enjoyed being here. She enjoyed the Opera Society people. They all enjoyed her a great deal. Lilli, to whom you spoke, will remember my mother, too, because mom would come to our meetings.³⁷ So a lovely lady, my mother was, really. She was religious, as I told you, but she was tremendously broad-minded and open-minded and flexible and accepting and encouraging and positive about so much of what her children did. Much as I was telling you with the narrative evals, if you write many positive things, then you can mix in a little dose of what needs some attention, because you’ve prepared a little shock absorber for the rest of it, by giving them at least the good points. There are always good points with students. You can always find something positive. There are, of course, some exceptions—a few, rarely—but they are still human, after all.

Hey, you know, I think it’s getting, is it getting time? I think it is.

³⁷ I called Lilli Hunter to do background research on Miriam’s involvement with the Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc.

Vanderscoff: Yes, it is. Yes, we're running up against time here. But yeah, I just wondered, did you ever talk with your mom about going for this doctorate, or whether she ever expressed anything about the life that you'd chosen?

Ellis: She always loved what I was doing. She always encouraged me. In fact, I think I started to tell you the story about when—I wrote this paper when I first got here, early on in my first or second class that I was taking with this professor who was a very by-the-book— He had his little *carnet*, his little notebook about that big [*indicates*] that he kept in his breast pocket, in which he wrote, with his tiny, tiny, little handwriting, notes that he brought back and read after, it must have been twenty or thirty years—he was still reading the same notes to the class. And I wrote him this paper, “A Survey of”—I think I told you that— “of French Theater in Nineteenth-Century France,” primarily. And he would not accept the paper after I had spent so many, many, many hours, so much work researching it and putting it together. He gave me back the paper and in no uncertain terms, said it was not acceptable.

Vicki and Jonathan were both students here now, as you know, when I got this paper back. I said, “I think I'm just going to go to this professor,” who shall remain nameless, just *au cas où*, just in case. I said, “I'm going to go to him and tell him, “That's it. I quit. I can't do this.” I said that to Vicki and Jonathan. Well, those two jumped on my case. You have no idea. They got so angry with me.

[*Calling*] Vicki! Vick! Vicki! [*no reply*] Oh, she may be sleeping after that bout with the physical therapist.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, maybe she's gone off, yeah.

Ellis: Maybe I'll just call her. [*rising to get phone*]

Vanderscoff: Watch that [*indicating the microphone cord*].

Ellis: [*Hitting buttons on her phone*] Why isn't it showing me my list? Oh, there she is. I have to make a long-distance phone call to Vicki. [*laughter*] She's probably sleeping. I hope not. Vick? Vick, are you sleeping, darling?

Vicky: [*over the speakerphone*] Well, I'm not now, am I?

Ellis: You're not now. Listen, I just would love it if you could hobble in here for one second to tell Cameron about the time when I said I was quitting, I no longer wanted to be a graduate student. Because I'm telling him—

Vicky: I don't remember that.

Ellis: You don't remember that. Too bad Jonathan isn't here with you. Okay, well, I remember it very well. You and Jonathan got on my case and told me that I couldn't dare quit, I shouldn't.

Vicki: I don't remember that.

Ellis: Yeah. Oh, you don't remember that, all right.

Vicki: I remember being poor, but is that why?

Ellis: No, no, that was not why. Okay, darling, all right. Okay, you go back and rest. Go and rest some more. Okay, darling. See you soon, bye. [*hangs up the phone*] Okay.

Vanderscoff: So, what is *your* memory of the event? So, you're discouraged by this experience. I wonder—

Ellis: I was very discouraged by it. And I thought, "I can't handle this. You know, I can't work under these conditions because it's just not who I am." How am I going to remake myself to the point where I become just an echo chamber for all of these fuddy-dud notions, which have nothing to do with the text and with the magnificent work that someone has engendered for who knows, for the centuries to come, perhaps, someone has put this piece into the canon. And then the critics take it apart. Because there's a leg of a table, that's a Freudian manifestation? You know, it was some of that rubbish that they were throwing around in those days. And then linking it up to whether it has economic or Marxist value or all of these crazy way-out— I mean, what about the absolute elegance of the discourse? What about the imagery? What about the metaphoric impact? What about the way that it speaks so directly to whatever it is within you, that can answer most directly to an elemental human experience and feeling, without having to take it all to pieces and destroy it?

It's one thing to take it apart and look at it, and then to put it back the way it was originally. But to deconstruct it and not reconstruct it, that's where I fall out with them; sorry. That's why I carry the notion of a moral value over to the act of translation, which is taking someone else's—the work of their mind, of their being, of their essence, of their experience, of their perspective—stealing that, and just destroying it? And to what avail? What is the point? What is this person, what is he or she or they, if there's a group of them, what are they gaining from this destruction? Is there some kind of sadistic joy therein?

Vanderscoff: So, for you, if you find it discouraging running into that, if you go into this episode and then your kids are saying you have to continue, so what happens next? How do you decide that, “Okay, I can continue in this?”

Ellis: Well, what happened next was that I went to work with Joe [Silverman]. And he shared my vision of literature as art, as beauty, as something to protect and to revere and to emulate, and to try and inspire others with that feeling of admiration and motivation to continue, to not only enjoy it, but to share in the enjoyment; to propound the enjoyment of it; to proselytize for the enjoyment of it; to try and make life more durable and more endurable and more meaningful by the very fact that we have these works that we can go to when we need some kind of solace; when we need some kind of other connection that we’re not getting in ways that are palpable in our daily lives. This is a different kind of connection. This is very real, even though it’s a very ephemeral connection. And it’s not one that is apparent to everyone, apparently—or maybe not necessary for everyone. Who knows? I don’t know.

So that’s when I went to work with Joe. And that was completely rewarding, because we were more or less on the same wavelength, I believe, in our approach to literature *qua art*.

Vanderscoff: That’s beautiful. I think that feeling is a great place to leave it for today, I think, that sentiment. And then we can pick up the next session. I have some ideas of where we can start, but just pause for now.

Ellis: Well, this young woman is going to call me tomorrow from the hospital. So, I don’t—

[*When the recording turns on, Ellis is beginning to speak about SCOSI, the Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc., which has included performances from guest artists*]

Ellis: —a great tenor, a promising young tenor who was, I believe he was already signed up to do *comprimario*, secondary roles in the San Francisco Opera. And that came into full force while we were debating about *doing a production of The Student Prince*, with this tenor as the lead, and since was committed to his contract at SFO, that never happened. Sherwood was very disappointed about that.

[*Vanderscoff affixes microphone to Ellis*] Oh yeah, have a lapel. So—

Vanderscoff: Well, what I was thinking—

Ellis: —he more or less kind of backed off from SCOSI because I think he saw it as a group of these old codgers who loved opera, but weren't experts or performers. They weren't musicologists. They were not people with whom he would be comfortable working, I guess— I don't know.

Whereas with me, I'm only too happy to see anyone who's warm, who has any interest in opera, and who's not a member of the *cognoscenti*. That's not the point. The point is it's a world that you keep learning about your whole life, and you still never know. It's like, "Oh yes, California, I know California." Really? Right. You know all the byways, all the little cutoffs and turnoffs and places? Of course, right. Your whole life you could be studying this state and not really know what makes it tick.

Vanderscoff: Well, I'd love to talk about your journey in that regard. Before we go any further, I'm going to pour myself a little drink of— [*moving to the table to get a drink from the spread there*]

Ellis: Please do, please.

Vanderscoff: Can I get you anything?

Ellis: No, I brought my own here today. I got my little jug of water, that's fine. I didn't put out the cranberry juice. Would you like the cranberry juice?

Vanderscoff: No, I'm just gonna have some Martinelli's, actually.

Ellis: Okay, whatever—and then I put out some fizzy lime water, whatever that is, that you might want to add to it.

Vanderscoff: So, we'll just go as long as is good today. And if you'd like to stop shy of four, we can do that. I'll stay attuned to that, and you'll just let me know, of course.

Ellis: Okay, sounds good.

Vanderscoff: Okay, so today is the—

Ellis: You're just not going to spill that on my white carpet, right?

Vanderscoff: I shall not. [*laughs*]

Ellis: This carpet is the bane of my existence. Because when we moved in, it was here, right? And it's been here ever since, and I've had to live with trying to keep it clean—never mind.

Vanderscoff: Well, I won't be a part of that—

Ellis: No, no, no. I know you won't.

Vanderscoff: —negative.

Ellis: Certainly. But I'm just mentioning that. It's like living on the edge of, I don't know what, of a volcano or something, on the lip.

Early Theatrical Productions

So I have been looking back at—because Sherwood said, “Well, I can't really remember all the productions that we did early on and in the Opera Workshop.”

Vanderscoff: Well, he remembered—³⁸

Ellis: I can make note of some of them here, which is good that I at least I can do that. We started full productions with a double bill of two one-act operas: “Gianni Scicchi” by Puccini, and “The Medium” by Menotti. After that, I did a new translation of *Die Fledermaus* (“The Bat's Revenge,”), and we did *Don Pasquale* and *South Pacific*. The last full production we did in the Opera Workshop was my translation of *Les Visitandines*, by Devienne. *Sisters of the Visitation* was its English title, and we inaugurated the new Music Center Recital Hall on campus in 1997, with those performances. But 1976 was a year to remember, because A), in September we established the Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc. as an entity. And then we filed to get it incorporated, and it took about four years until the incorporation actually happened. But we had corporate status and nonprofit status, of course, since its inception, which was very nice.

³⁸ I called Sherwood Dudley to conduct background research.

Vanderscoff: So, if '76 becomes this iconic year, I'm a little bit curious about the journey there.

Ellis: Well, what happened there is, we did a production of *Don Pasquale*, which was pretty rarely performed. Donizetti wrote about eighty operas, and this was his final comedy. And it's just charming and delightful music, very light-hearted. It's the old cliché about "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," and also, "There's no fool like an old fool." This silly old bachelor, who's very wealthy, decides—he's got only one nephew, to whom he intends to leave his fortune. And the nephew falls in love with a young widow who's very attractive but also very poor. And the old man wants his nephew to marry higher in the social standard, and especially financially.

And so, he threatens to disown him if he continues this dalliance with Norina, this young widow. And in the interim, he gets so angry with his nephew, whose name, ironically, is Ernesto—very earnest, right—and Pasquale says, "If you don't give her up, I'm going to disinherit you. And in fact, I'm going to get married myself," says the old fellow.

He has a very close friend whose name is Dr. Malatesta, which, in Italian, means bad head. *[laughs]* In other words, someone you should not put too much trust in, if you want to take his name literally. He turns out to be the mover and shaker of the plot because he decides to get Norina, the young woman with whom Ernesto is in love, the nephew is in love. Pasquale has never met Norina, so he has no idea what she looks like. And so Malatesta decides to have Norina pretend that she is his sister, who is just coming out of the convent, pure as the driven snow and innocent, completely innocent.

And so, he brings Norina to Pasquale, who immediately falls madly in love with this beautiful young thing who's so pure and innocent and so self-effacing and so modest and so charming. She scrapes and bows her head and is so diminutive and so pure and so proper. And she tells her brother—Malatesta is supposed to be her brother—"Brother, I cannot show my face. There is a man present. I must hide behind my veil." She puts on all this air of being so absolutely, perfectly pure and marvelous and obedient and obsequious to—whatever the old man says is wonderful and brilliant for her. And she goes into ecstasy over every word that he lavishes on her, every bit of attention that he gives her.

So eventually, Malatesta makes a charade of a marriage. He uses a friend of his to pose as the notary to make this mock marriage between Pasquale and Norina. And the minute that they are married, of course, the entire atmosphere changes. She explodes into this vixen. She starts ordering the butler to hire a whole range of servants, because there are too few to please her. She takes over the house, starts spending all of Pasquale's money. You know, the complete obverse to what he thought he was getting in a mate. So that's the gist of the plot. It's very cleverly carried out. And of course, Ernesto shows up and almost ruins the whole charade. But Malatesta takes him aside and explains to him, "Just be patient and it will all work out for your good."

And in fact, Pasquale tells Ernesto that he's disowning him, because now he has a wife, and he's going to have all these babies [*laughs*] with this young wife, right. It's going to be a different world for Ernesto. So, Ernesto gets ready to leave, to run away somewhere and hide his sorrows elsewhere. And so, they go on and on. And eventually, to tell you the *dénouement*, Norina and Ernesto disguise themselves as lovers and sing a beautiful, passionate duet

offstage, meant for Pasquale's ears, for him to hear and be completely fooled by it. And finally, he gets so angry with Norina that he orders her to just stay home, because she's all dressed up to go out on the town by herself on their wedding night. He's outraged by that. And at one point, she slaps him; they have a terrible fight, and she slaps him. And he throws her out. All of this wonderful fun is going on.

Vanderscoff: And so, you—

Ellis: So that's *Don Pasquale*. That was the piece that we decided to do in English, because I had translated it. We didn't have a venue to do the opera on campus. In those days, it was very hard to find performance space. Things were booked years in advance, and there weren't that many performance spaces.

Vanderscoff: What were the performance spaces on campus?

Ellis: So, we did the performances downtown, just where Mission turns into the freeway, if you're familiar with that turn there. There's a turn there, and there's a little white house, a little white building on the corner there, just where you turn into getting the approach to the freeway. So, we did it there. It was the Santa Cruz Women's Club. It was a charming facility, very welcoming, very intimate, very warm—and warm in the sense of welcoming, that kind of warm.

We had four performances, free. We had packed audiences every night. And this was the community—these were townspeople, because it was right in the heart of downtown Santa Cruz. This was not the campus. This was a real town-gown kind of enterprise. We had people who came two or three times to see it. They would stay afterwards and thank us vociferously.

They were so pleased. So that was the inspiration for the Santa Cruz Opera Society, because Sherwood and I agreed, “Look, there’s an interest in opera in this town! Who knew?”

Vanderscoff: Were you aware of any history of opera performances or opera organizations in Santa Cruz prior to SCOSI?

Ellis: No, I was not. I believe there was some kind of an old opera house, as all small towns in the nineteenth century would have what they called an opera house. They had all kinds of musicals or whatever events in it. But qua opera, I don’t believe that had been—I may very well be wrong. Someone with more of a knowledge of Santa Cruz’s older history would have to comment on that.

Vanderscoff: And who was your cast and crew for this play? Were they from the town or from the university?

Ellis: This was our Opera Workshop class coming off campus. We had a wonderful young set designer. He designed a simple, but excellent, just-perfectly-right-tone-for what-we-were-doing set, which worked. We had the students in the class with the orchestra. Sherwood [Dudley] conducted the orchestra. It wasn’t a huge orchestra, but they did very well. I think we had piano accompaniment as well.

So, as I was saying, those four performances gave us a new vista on the town and on the community, and a hope that perhaps we could put together some kind of a community group that would pursue people’s interest and educate them to have a greater interest in opera, in the art form.

Vanderscoff: So, if that's 1976, and by this time you have students in the Opera Workshop, I'm wondering if we could rewind to how you got to the point where you could put on these productions. And my first question in that line would be, when you came here in 1971, what were your first impressions, your first experiences of the arts on campus? What was the state of the arts on campus at that time?

Ellis: The very first thing—I came in September. And I see, remembering dates, that in January of '72, we presented *L'Avare*, which is Molière's—one of his great *grandes comédies* was *The Miser*. We presented it in English, through the Stevenson little theater players or whatever they called themselves at the time. There was a whole group; it was made up of profs from all over campus. There was a pretty active arts scene on campus. There was music; there was dance; there was theater.

Vanderscoff: Who were some of the key players in theater or the arts when you arrived? Was there anyone with whom you were interacting?

Ellis: Well, primarily I was working with Sherwood and with other music profs, people in music. Eventually, I worked with Professor of Baroque Dance, Shirley Wynne, who became one of my dearest friends; she worked with us on "Fledermaus" to set the choreography and teach our students to do the Viennese waltzes in the score.

Then, for Les Trétaux, the French theater project, when we did a Molière comédie-ballet, "l'amour médecin" (Doctor Love), Shirley graciously trained some of our Language students in dances of the Baroque period and even made their costumes. What a gift it was to work

with this consummate scholar, world-renowned expert on Baroque dance and a wonderfully generous colleague and cherished friend.

Vanderscoff: Did you work with Leta Miller, maybe?

Ellis: With Leta Miller, yes. I was just going to mention Leta, yes, and Nohema Fernandez, with whom I performed. And we went, and I noticed this in looking back at it—that we had done that program, *Les Chansons de Bilitis, The Songs of Bilitis*, by Debussy written to some very exotic, erotic poetry? Debussy³⁹ set Pierre Louy's poetry to music, for flute and piano, with a Narrator, whose role I played. Leta Miller was on the flute and Nohema Fernandez on piano.

Vanderscoff: So, it's your impression when you arrived that there was a robust art scene?

Ellis: Yes, yes there was. There was a lot of interest in it. There was a lot of performing going on. There were a lot of, not big productions necessarily, because there wasn't that much of a program yet. But it was in the process of becoming developed.

Vanderscoff: And what were the venues in those days? Where were you performing on campus?

Ellis: College Five was the big one—Porter now—Porter College, was the big one. And then we, in music, used the old concert hall, which was a small room but with very nice acoustics, and a little space backstage for storage. So, we used that space quite frequently for our performances. You asked me if I became acquainted with other faculty in the Performing Arts

³⁹ Pierre Louÿs wrote the original poetry collection and Debussy subsequently set some of the poems to music.

on campus and I must certainly enthuse about Professor Shirley Wynne, renowned expert in Baroque dance, who became a dear friend and worked with students in my Trétaux d'essai production of Molière's "l'Amour médecin" (*Doctor Love*) a *comédie-ballet*, training my French language students in authentic 17th century choreography, of which she was a world-renowned interpreter and mentor. She worked for many years with Alan Curtis, harpsichordist and Early Music specialist, with whom she did the choreography and stage direction for the revival of many operas by Handel.

[*looking at her CV*] Okay, so that was in—I'm all the way into the eighties.⁴⁰ That was Debussy's *Bilitis* for flute, piano, and narrator. I did that with Leta and Nohema, first in Watsonville, and then at Stanford—we travelled, and then we even went to UC San Diego and did a performance there, as well as on campus here. So, we did those four performances together.

And I started, even in the eighties, to work on the text and translation of *Les Visitandines*, *The Sisters of the Visitation*.

Vanderscoff: Oh yes, I was talking about that with [Sherwood] Dudley. But before we get in the eighties, I wonder about some of your own earliest involvement. So, there's the scene; there are people doing performances. Where do you fit into that scene? How do you find your place in that?

Ellis: Well, the scene was that I wanted to continue what I had done when I was at other schools. I always had a little group of students in French doing bits of theater as a very

⁴⁰ Their rendition of *Bilitis* was performed in 1987.

important complement to the regular pedagogy, because that, to me, is a tremendous tool for language acquisition. So, when I came, I immediately broached the idea to my fellow French faculty members: let's see what students might be interested in augmenting their work with some theater experience. And so, I started *Les Tréteaux d'essai*, "the boards," more or less, "the boards of *essai*." *Essai* is pronounced like an "essay," when you write an essay, and also are the initials for "S," the letter in the alphabet "S," and the letter in the alphabet, "C," are pronounced "es-say," like the word "*essai*," which means to try. So, it's kind of a play on the words: *Les Tréteaux d'essai*. So, the boards, or the planks they used to put down—at the fairs, they would put two sawhorses with a couple of planks over them, and they called them *les tréteaux*, the boards. Those were the first little rudimentary theaters in France in the Middle Ages. So, I called it *Les Tréteaux d'essai*. *Essai* really means that we're trying something, [laughs] with a little play. That was what we called it, also, because of our location in Santa Cruz.

So, I started to work right away, from when I had arrived, just about, with this group from Stevenson [College] who were trying to put on a production, a staged production of Molière's great comedy, but in English. The fellow who was directing it had never directed anything. He was a graduate student from, I don't recall, Australia or the UK, whose office was in College Five, or Porter—it didn't become Porter until much later, by the way.⁴¹

When I arrived, I said, "You know, well, I've done a bit of French theater." I said, "I certainly have done quite a lot of work with Molière. So, if you would like some help, I'd be really

⁴¹ College Five, which opened in 1969, was renamed Benjamin F. Porter College in 1981, after a historic resident of Santa Cruz and grandfather of three key UCSC funders.

delighted to get in on the production.” So, it was as simple as that. He was only too pleased. I helped with costumes and with stage movement and with interpretation and with the text—the translation left a bit here and there to be desired. So, whenever that was needed, I helped with that, and with characterization—all the different elements that needed to be addressed.

And I got to meet some very important and interesting and very welcoming faculty members. There were almost all males in the cast—it was quite a few males. There were one or two female members, two of the faculty, who were involved in that production. So, it was kind of a down-home little theater group getting together. It was all very, very collegial and fun and satisfying.

Sherwood, I met on that production, because he was conducting the music. There was a bit of a musical score that went with *L'Avare*, with the text. And he used, in the seventeenth-century style, a staff, a large one, about, oh, I don't know, a five-foot-long staff, to pound with. That was the way they kept time then. It was not sticks, *bâtons*, or hands or anything like that; it was banging away to keep the time on the stage itself. So, we tried to keep that historical reference. Also, we costumed the musicians—we found period wigs and costumes for the orchestra. That was fun, too, for them. They enjoyed that.

So, we did a little production of *The Miser*. That was it. And with that, I first met a few of the people, whom I learned much later, of course, were some of the really important movers and shakers on campus. You know, everyone's a ham somewhere at heart. And so, there were quite a few very nice people that I met during that production.

Then when it came to do the French theater, I started that actually in '72. I did that the following—although *L'Avare* was, I think, January '72. But I did this in May, in spring; I put on the first little *Tréteaux d'essai* performance. I think I noted it on here. [*going through her CV*] I was looking at it before, and I thought I noted that. Because for that one, I know that I got some space at College Five, some time to use their facility so that we could have a place to do it, to do the presentation. Oh, I was so sure I had mentioned it in here. I think we just called it “*une soirée*,” something very broad and all-encompassing: “an evening of theater and poetry” or “an evening of theater, comedy, and poetry,” or whatever—you know, something simple like that, just as a little trial. We got our French students interested in it and we had a decent little presentation with music and some poetry and some little scenes.

It turned out to be a worthwhile effort, and out of that grew a tradition of trying to do some French theater on campus every year, as long as I could. And then when we began work with the Opera Workshop, that took precedence. Couldn't do both productions at the same time. A little thing called, “I was also taking classes then.” I had other things to do.

Vanderscoff: So, you do *Les Tréteaux* those first years, but it starts a tradition of doing theater in French.

Ellis: Oh, not just the first years. I think it went from '72 all the way up to 2000—but there were a couple of *lacunes* here and there, where I didn't do it because I was busy doing the opera program. I couldn't do both productions at the same time.

[*looking over her CV*] So *Don Pasquale* was '76. And then we finished *Don Pasquale*. And a few weeks later—about five weeks later, something like that—we opened *South Pacific*, the first musical, I believe, that was given on campus. We did the entire work.

It had a very large cast. We did it in the new theater—in theater arts, we managed to get the hall for a few performances. It was an open stage—it was not proscenium—completely open. I had not directed in that kind of environment before. I learned as I went, believe me, very quickly.

And especially when it came to rapid changes—there is an instantaneous change that happens at the beginning of that musical, within, I would say, probably three minutes of its opening. There's a little scene with the children and their Dad singing "*Dites-moi pourquoi la vie est belle*," (Tell me, why life is beautiful, "you know, a little French ditty, with their Papa. And then, in one split instant, there is a whole platoon of American servicemen standing in neat formation, who burst into the rousing chorus of, "There Is Nothing Like a Dame," that wonderful piece. Which is perhaps sexist, but also very true: "There is nothing you can name/that is anything like a dame." [*laughs*]

It's got to be an instantaneous scene change, just in the blink of an eye, literally. That was, for me, a great challenge. I had never been there, done that. Because I didn't know about modern pieces of machinery that you can use. The one we used, called "a wagon," was on wheels—it was a large platform on wheels. You can pre-set the characters on it, because it's mobile. So, they were all pre-set and brought on just as we cut the lights on the first tiny vignette. And the music [*snaps*] went right to it: "There Is Nothing Like a Dame." And it went over well.

That pleased me a great deal, because I'd never been called on to do that kind of a quick change.

Vanderscoff: What kind of resources are you drawing on, financially and otherwise? Is there a big costume collection on campus at this time? How are you getting these productions together?

Ellis: There's a costume shop. I don't know about the finances. I guess Sherwood got money through the Music Board. I was only a TA. I was just the behind-the-scenes helper, who made it all happen; I wasn't worrying about finances or budgets. That was not my area of necessity. Primarily what I needed to do was figure out *who was going to do what, and how they were going to do it*. That was quite enough of a challenge, thank you, for me.

Vanderscoff: Sherwood mentioned to me on the phone that *South Pacific* was a part of the bicentennial. Does that sound right?

Ellis: Oh yes, because it was '76. And I remember distinctly writing in the program—and you know who gave me a program from our *South Pacific*? Tom Lehrer. He kept all the programs of all the things that we did on campus. And one day, recently, he showed up and handed me one from SP, and I'm very grateful to him for having kept it.

There was a large cast, really—when I look back on it, a very large cast. And it was quite demanding.

Vanderscoff: What was it like working with the students as cast and crew in those days?

Ellis: Wonderful. They were great. They were very, very interested, very reliable, very mature, some of them extremely gifted. I think it was a pretty good production, on the whole. People seemed to enjoy it very much. And in fact, we drafted a gentleman from the community, because we needed an older person to play Émile, the leading man;—after all, he’s the father of these two children, and he’s older than Nellie.⁴² In any case, we found someone, and he was so delighted. He, in fact, got in touch with me a couple of months ago, just for some other question he had about something. That was a real voice from the past, suddenly to re-appear on the phone. I keep wanting to say “Tony” because that’s what this fellow’s real name is: Tony.

And we had, of course, a fine array of young people to draw on, to be the nurses and the sailors, the military wing.

Vanderscoff: So, all of this sounds very deeply researched and deeply practiced, but also in a kind of joyous, open amateur tradition, that you’re inviting people in, who are new to the theater. I wonder if you could talk about that in context with the spirit of UCSC in those days, doing that production.

Ellis: That’s right with everything I was telling you about the other day: the openness, the flexibility, and above all, this *insatiable*, Cameron, this insatiable and unquenchable thirst for knowledge, for learning, for trying, for experimenting, for creating, for delving into, for daring, for meeting challenges, or making challenges and meeting them, you know? Making your own challenges and pursuing the objective that they represent. Yes, that’s the kind of

⁴² Probably Emile de Becque, one of the central roles.

place it was. It was a discovery-of-life place, really. And there is so much to discover and so much to know and to learn and to capture and to taste and to share. It's endless. It's called life. And what other atmosphere could you ask for than that one up there, with those magnificent, all-knowing trees? The omniscient trees, which have such patience and such knowledge that we will never have. And so that was what lay underneath the busy surface.

I was learning, too, about stagecraft. Things that, as I think I've told you in one of our discussions of my training in French theater, which was lastly interested in the spectacle side of things. And here, when you're venturing forth into these other realms of production, spectacle becomes a really very important part—what the spectator sees. Not that it has to be a multi-million-dollar investment in crazy effects—I don't mean spectacle from that standpoint. I mean spectacle in the sense of what the eye takes in, as well as the hearing and the feeling and so forth, of being present at something that's being created in front of your eyes.

Vanderscoff: That sounds to me like—you can correct me if I'm wrong—but a little bit of the splendor and the feeling of the French Grand Opera kind of tradition.

Ellis: Which came into being late in the mid-nineteenth century—the tremendous Vasco da Gama going to Africa and finding a new continent, little things like that. *L'Africaine* I'm thinking of, yes, and I'm thinking of all of those potboilers, those operas, *Les Huguenots*, for instance. Most of them have fallen out of interest today, because they do demand huge casts and pots and pots of money and many effects that are very hard and very expensive to duplicate or to replicate. And you know Halévy, and Meyerbeer, who was the one that wrote all of those really big, big works—? He was extremely popular in the nineteenth century

French— Grand Opera really is one with huge casts, huge choruses, lots of set changes, breaking the old rules to a great extent—it's not all in one place in twenty-four hours anymore. Things are broadening and they are swooping out, and they are searching. And that's the idea for their being "grands."

And nowadays, people commonly use the term "grand opera" for something that is not one, indeed— *Pasquale* is not a grand opera. *Pasquale* is an intimate comedy, right, and charming and delightful. It doesn't fit into the characterization and the real definition of what a grand opera is. Because grand, after all, means just that: big and impressive.

Vanderscoff: Well, I bring it up because you're talking about doing these big productions. And it involves all this experimentation for you, about how do you do these scene changes—

Ellis: Oh yeah, for me, because I had not come from a background that featured or even looked at that aspect of stagecraft. That was not even a consideration when you're zeroing in on the text and the actor. All the rest becomes peripheral and becomes adjunctive and becomes complementary, but does not become necessarily integral to what you're trying to do. We're getting back to putting down what all the critics say, or having your own opinion, going back to that creative urge that you're following on your own, as opposed to what has been done before and that you're just maybe repeating or trying to repeat, imitate.

Anyway, so you were asking about the Opera Workshop.

Vanderscoff: Yes, I'd be very curious about the story of the Opera Workshop and if that was—was that the beginning of opera on campus? I'm curious about that context.

Ellis: Well, still today there is an Opera Workshop. But they call it something else—I think they call it “University Opera Theater” now.⁴³ We more modestly called it a workshop, because that’s what it really was. We were learning. We were feeling our way in so many areas.

You were asking me about productions that we did. So, we did Gianni Schicchi and *The Medium*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Don Pasquale*. We did *South Pacific*. We did the first act of what Sherwood and I started to work on in those days, actually, of the *Figaro*.⁴⁴ I think that was already in the nineties, though, when we ended our Workshop collaboration with *Les Visitandines* (*Sisters of the Visitation*)— And before that is where SCOSI and the Opera Workshop crossed paths, because we got this marvelous bass-baritone named Monte Pederson, who was at San Francisco Opera, and he became one of our *protégés* in our Young Artists series from SCOSI. Monte was an amiable fellow, very unassuming, extremely talented, tall—good-looking, a quick study. He was wonderfully gifted musically and theatrically, as well.

And so, we managed to get him to be—what year was that? I think that was in the nineties already, where Monte came on campus for one quarter, for the spring quarter for the Workshop. We got some kind of grant to pay him to be here, some kind of an honorarium for him. That was really great. We did the first act of our *Figaro*. And we did some scenes from *Les Visitandines*, which we were working on, in the workshop. We had Monte play the lead in the *Figaro*; he was our Figaro in the first act of *Le nozze di Figaro*.

⁴³ It is now called “University Opera Theater.”

⁴⁴ In reference to their translation of *The Marriage of Figaro*, “*The Flexible Figaro*.”

And, for all too brief a time, he went on to build a career—actually, his big call was in Wagner. He ended up being a much-in-demand Wagnerian star as Wotan. He was considered to be one of the world's leading new, young Wotans, which is a very difficult role. But unfortunately, dear Monte, terrible fortune, left us at the all too untimely age of, I believe he was forty-two or forty-three, when he died of stomach cancer. He had already been at La Scala. He had debuted at the Met. In fact, I have two pictures—I put them in the other room—that Monte sent me of himself on stage at the Met. They are of him as Orestes in Strauss's *Elektra*. He's the brother, who comes home, and Elektra doesn't know who he is at first, but they recognize each other in a great reunion scene in the work.

Monte made his name first as the Flying Dutchman here in San Francisco Opera. In Europe, he had a long-term contract with the Vienna Staatsoper; he was on their roster for many seasons. In Seattle, he had four very major roles: one was in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, where he played all four of the villains. In Puccini's *Tosca*, he played Scarpia I'm learning more and more about Monte's career, short as it was, but quite impressive already, and with so much promise. And to go that early, what a tragedy that was, a horrible tragedy.

So, he was with us for, I believe it was a month or so, that spring, when he was our artist in residence, and played several roles in the Opera Workshop performances. And then he appeared—they did a performance of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*. He appeared in that—as long as he was on campus, you know—for the music department. So, he went over there and did that special concert. [*Miriam rises to look for programs*]

Vanderscoff: Here, let me unclip you.

Ellis: Yeah, I have the program for it right—I just came across the program, by chance, for *Les Noces* somewhere.

Vanderscoff: Do you want me to grab that for you?

Ellis: Yes, if you want—

Vanderscoff: Yeah, you take a seat, I can go—

Ellis: It's in one of these folders.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, I'll search through.

Ellis: Yes, would you please look? It's on a smallish program.

Vanderscoff: Would it be somewhere in this folder?

Ellis: No, this is the folder from the Playhouse.

Vanderscoff: Okay, so that's not the correct one.

Ellis: So, it's probably not the right one. It might be—

Vanderscoff: Here's Monte Pederson. [*showing program*]

Ellis: Oh yes, yes. And look at that, look at that—

Vanderscoff: [*reading from program*] "An afternoon of opera."

Ellis: —that was another time he came through SCOSI to do a program on campus. And John helped with that—John Dizikes, of course, helped set that up. Let's see, I think we had two or

three SCOSI-Cowell programs over the years, concerts together. I have so many of these young artists' programs, right? And we have to find more of them with Monte. There's *Marriage of Figaro*.

Vanderscoff: So, we're scrolling through a bunch of SCOSI programs from the eighties and nineties, showing the series of young artists that they had. And this one here, "Cowell—"

Ellis: Oh, here is another one. Here's one with Monte again, and Mark Fox, who was also—

Vanderscoff: It's 1981.

Ellis: —I think, under contract with San Francisco. Opera for supporting roles, mostly. Maybe he was also in the chorus. I'm not sure of that. See, what I wanted to do as part of SCOSI was this series, which went on for many years, and featured different singers of different levels of expertise in their careers.

Will they have a career or is there not to be a career—we didn't know, did we?

Vanderscoff: This is the young artists series, for the record.

Ellis: The object was to give them a chance to be heard by a live audience. And it was to give Santa Cruz folks a chance to hear some opera right in their downtown, right here.

Vanderscoff: So where were you sourcing the performers, where were you—?

Ellis: We would get donations. We would get little grants here and there to do, as I think I've spelled out somewhere in my CV, where we would get little grants to do this or that. And we

would not charge, but we would ask for donations at the door to help cover the costs so we could be able to pay everybody, even if only a small amount.

Vanderscoff: So, you would fundraise primarily to bring artists from outside of Santa Cruz to Santa Cruz, rather than sourcing artists from here. Is that correct?

Ellis: Sometimes there were local people, too, whom we helped. Oh, here's *Les Noces*—that's the one I was mentioning. Monte also did that while he was here on campus. I don't know if they have the year in here or not.

Vanderscoff: So, this is a Stravinsky and Debussy program. It's in March of what year? I'm not sure. [*thumbing through program*]

Ellis: [*indicating another program*] Now, this woman started with us. She had been our student in the Opera Workshop.

Vanderscoff: [*reading from program*] Patty Barton.

Ellis: And she wanted to become a coach and accompanist for opera singers. She is now, has been, for many decades now, the *régisseur*—which means the head coach, more or less—of the Madrid opera. She came back to Santa Cruz for a visit in whatever year that says, '92. And we put together, real lickety-split, a program with several of her friends from here, in different areas of expertise and performance. So that's the last time we had Patty back. But she was our mainstay for SCOSI in both the Young Artists series and in our Outreach performances around the Santa Cruz area; she was so important to all of these programs and concerts and recitals that we did with these young singers. Can you imagine the kind of

experience that she got? She had just finished her BA on campus in piano—and she did a fantastic recital for her senior recital—and here was SCOSI, starting out to do performances hither and thither and yon.

Are you familiar with the Capitola Mall, where you can go shopping?

Vanderscoff: Yes.

Ellis: Where there's a big fountain in one spot, a beautiful big fountain?

Vanderscoff: Oh, near an entrance kind of, yeah.

Ellis: Yes, near, not far from one of the entrances. And it's kind of raised—there's a little raised area there. Well, we helped to open that place. I remember distinctly Patty had some kind of a little piano—they brought in some little piano for her, and she accompanied. And I took a group of singers over there, and we helped to open the Capitola Mall.

So, we were always involved in the community in some way or another, either the work at the nursing homes or the schools or the senior centers or whatever, because that's the important point. And out of those appearances and those little performances, we got people interested in joining and being part of the Opera Society. That was one way to make them aware that we existed.

Vanderscoff: I'd love to hear more about your programs in schools and retirement homes, why you focused on those areas.

Ellis: Trying, at nine AM, to bring a measure of opera or operetta or musical, classical musical pieces to young children, and to get the singers up and singing at nine AM, that was another real challenge, speaking of challenges, right? *[laughs]*

And at one point I got—there was a program from either the Cultural Council of the county or of the city cultural arts commission in Santa Cruz. I got a small grant from them, enough to pay for us to make some sets. I had a very, very talented woman who lived in Davenport, where the artists live. Her name was Robin Snow and she took some flats—you know what flats are? Just a flat canvas-covered surface, and you paint, it and you can make scenes and so forth. She got, I believe, three flats. They were mobile; they were on little wheels, so that you could turn them as if they were pages in a book. So, you just pushed the flat out of the way, and you had another scene.

And so, we did *Hansel and Gretel*, the opera, in a somewhat shortened version and in English. And our Vicki was the Sandman, who comes to serenade the two children, lost in the forest, with a beautiful lullaby *[humming and singing a melody]*. Oh well, I can't sing worth anything anymore, but anyway, so Vicki did that scene for us. And we had Kathy Nitz and we had Gene Lewis, and we had a few other local singers. And we went around to different schools in the county with our traveling version of *Hansel and Gretel* for the kids. They loved it—they really did. What didn't work really well was the hours, that we had to be there at the crack of dawn. It was really hard for the singers to get away, and most of them had other classes or jobs or whatever. So, we did that for a while, too. That was with SPECTRA.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ SPECTRA is an educational outreach and support program of the Arts Council of Santa Cruz County.

Vanderscoff: The retirement homes, as well, you were saying—

Ellis: Retirement homes, yes. But SPECTRA was specifically for the schools, though, for this program. And we started with the schools not far from campus; up on High Street there's a very fine elementary school. One of the leading teachers in that school, I believe she may have been the wife of someone on campus whom I knew, I can't remember now. I think they're both gone. But she was very instrumental in helping us find schools that would be interested in having this kind of experience for their little ones.

When was that, in the seventies or eighties? No, no, maybe it was eighties or nineties. I don't remember, Cameron. I'm sure I've got it written down. I have to go through and try and figure out what years it was. You know, all the years just start to clump together after a while into one mass of forgetfulness. *[laughs]*

I remember that we did scenes from opera for the public through the Opera Workshop, and invited people to come on campus. I don't think we ever charged anything; there was never an admission charge. I remember once that we did—from the scene in the Lillas Pastia Inn, in *Carmen*, the gypsy song with the dance, in Act II, near the opening—where they all get up and dance, including Carmen and her friends, and it gets wilder. At first, the music starts slowly, and then it builds and builds and builds to a really mad pace at the end. The audience really loved that, all of the movement, and we got them wanting to join in the dancing. It was very exciting. And I still remember, a dear lady in the audience stood up and said to me directly: "Do it all again; Didn't you hear all that applause?" Unfortunately, we hadn't rehearsed such an "encore!" Rather, we continued with the program.

And we performed, on another program, a scene from Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*, from *Orpheus and Euridice*—we did the French version—"At the Gates of Hell," I don't know if you're familiar with that piece. But it's supposed to be the damned in hell who face and threaten Orpheus, who has come to look for his beloved, Eurydice, who's dead, and who's there among this group. And they all frighten and menace him, all these horrible creatures are so frightening and so scary, and trying to chase him away. He pleads with them and pleads with them. Finally, he plays a little bit of music and sings a little bit, to try to persuade them to let him pass—finally, through his music, he's able to entice them to let him go through the gates, so that he can find his beloved.

So, we did that scene. And instead of making hell, reds and oranges—which is the usual setting, it's supposed to be so hot—I said, "I think it would be much more hellish if it were complete isolation for each individual, loneliness. You can never touch anyone. It's cold. It's blue and white, and stark, and unrewarding, and all sharp lines and no curves." You know, just really horrendously, the epitome of oneness, of singleness. I considered that would be a better way to show hell, than the usual red. Light-wise, how do you manufacture hell, right? Suffering, the idea of suffering—what color is it?

Vanderscoff: Where do you think that particular idea came from, that hell would be an isolated, lonely place, rather than a crowded, hot—

Ellis: It just came to my aberrant brain. Who knows where we get ideas? I just didn't want to do the usual cliché lighting. Because first of all, we were singing it in French and not in Italian. [*mock scandalized*] Oh! That was number one. That was enough of a change. "*Qui mai è Eribe,*"

that's the Italian, and the French is "*Qui loin d'Érébus.*" *Érébus* is the name of the dog who guards the gates of hell, so I believe. So that was one scene that we did, which I recall.

And of course, we did the whole Act I of *Figaro*, that I mentioned, with Monte. Maybe next time, if we have an ultimate session, I'll find my file on Monte and show you some of the mementos that I have in that file. I think I have a picture of him as Figaro. He was so handsome in that role. Of course, he would never have played it on the professional opera stage, because he was not a comic. He was a very serious kind of character. I mean, he could carry a degree of comedy, but nothing too complicated. I gave him some direction that he followed very well. Yes, I worked with Monte and what a pleasure it was to direct him.

Vanderscoff: All these things that you're talking about, they speak to the challenge of building an opera culture without an opera house, it seems.

Ellis: Oh, yes. *[laughs]* Without any money, without any cachet, without anything. But you'd be surprised, there were more and more— Do you know what happened with SCOSI, now in its forty-third year? September 6th, we were forty-three years old. Now we have a new cadre, a board of directors of younger people, in their sixties, I like to call them, "the kids." Lilli and I hope they have a long way to go yet, and we're so pleased that they have found out about us one way or another. And one of the demands of being part of SCOSI as a member, someday, someday, somehow, some way, you are going to be called upon to do a program at one of the monthly meetings that we have. Because that's what we like to do—we like to get everyone involved, as many folks as we can. Just being passive and listening and watching, that's marvelous. That's where you start. But then, when you have to go into researching and considering and creating and synthesizing and putting together a cohesive program to share

with your fellow opera lovers, that is when you get some real joy and pleasure and understanding and knowledge out of the whole enterprise. You know, you learn best in teaching. You must know that by now. It's when *you* do the learning, right?

Vanderscoff: So, with that in mind, in retrospect, what are your feelings about the challenges and opportunities of doing opera in a place like Santa Cruz, instead of doing it in one of the centers of opera, like New York or Paris or even San Francisco?

Ellis: We have this Bay Shore Opera, which started out about maybe twenty or so years ago being a small company that gave performances. So, they have now appeared in another incarnation of trying to do opera performances at the Veterans Hall, that little place, if you know it, downtown there. It would be great if they chose the right material. But what do they choose? They choose something like *Aida*, which is a grand opera. You mentioned grand opera. Well, that's what *is* a grand opera, in the sense that you have an *enormous* cast, a very large chorus. You have all kinds of set demands, and the score needs a full orchestra, too, not just a small ensemble. And it seems, in my humble opinion, that they keep on choosing what I consider to be the wrong repertoire to be trying to do with the abilities and the talents, the budget, the constraints of the place where they perform, and the size of the orchestra. There are very many wonderful, small operatic works that are just dying to be done, and that would be perfect to do with her little group. This pearl of the *bel canto* repertoire demands a huge understanding of technique and a mastery and an energy and a comprehension of characterization and an ability to recreate, in a believable way, all of the nuances that are in that score. And I keep saying to myself, "Why don't you choose something that is right there, *à la portée*, you know, something that is doable, that is not extending yourself so far?"

Joe Silverman always used to tell me that. He always used to say, “Miriam, always ask yourself, is it worth doing the play in the first place?” Which is a very good guideline, by the way.

Vanderscoff: Well so in a way, you’re talking from a teaching angle here, a pedagogical angle, which is that she needs to find the right material relative to—

Ellis: Yes! I mean, it’s wonderful to face a challenge. As I said earlier on, set yourself challenges and then see if you can meet them. That’s great if you can. If you can’t, that’s all right, you shouldn’t be taken out and shot. But on the other hand, why be foolish about something?

By contrast, there is a relatively new classical music performing group in this town called Espressivo. And Espressivo is the name of a little chamber orchestra which was founded by a fellow named Michel Singher. Now, Martial Singher was a very famous, wonderfully gifted baritone in the forties, fifties, sixties. I used to hear him all the time on the Met broadcasts, and he was great. This gentleman, Michel, happens to be his son. And of all places that he decided that he was going to retire, I believe it was Ben Lomond he chose, or one of those places there in the valley.

Vanderscoff: Ben Lomond, Felton. Those are—

Ellis: Perhaps it’s Boulder Creek—I’m not sure. It’s one of them. But that’s where he decided he wanted to retire.

So, he's in the area. And what does he do? And we're talking about a fellow who was, at least on three continents, a renowned conductor. Martial's son, Michel, spent a large part of his youth, his younger years as a pianist, frequently accompanying his father when the father went on recital tours, which singers often do.

And so, Michel went with Martial and was a stage brat. He was brought up in the theater, in opera houses and in concert halls. He is a member of SCOSI, because several of the people who are on the board of his Espressivo ensemble, of his little orchestra, are also on the board of SCOSI—some of these younger ones I was telling you about, who have joined us in the last maybe five or six or eight years.

Vanderscoff: So, it sounds like you've really built up opera in this—

Ellis: So, we have this cooperation together with the SCOSI members, when they go to Espressivo concerts—we just had one last week, a concert by them. Excellent. And Michel has become a very valued member of SCOSI now. It's a pleasure to have him. He's given us a few talks about opera houses and opera people with whom he's worked. He always has some nice anecdotes to share, and some bits of gossip and some wonderful professional comments, which we appreciate hearing. So, it's a pleasure to have him here. I wonder if I have—anyway, do you like classical music? When you're not here, you're in New York, so—

Vanderscoff: I do like classical music. I do like opera, although I'm not a very well-versed opera listener. I'd be more classical. Rock and roll's really the center of my interest, but classical music, yes, and certain operas.

Ellis: What do you like in the classics, for example? Do you like Baroque, Romantic, Modern, what? What area?

Vanderscoff: Classical music, it would be mostly romantic, some classical—Chopin, Rachmaninoff. And then a little bit more recently, someone like Eric Satie or something like that, which is getting into more Modernist—but anyone like that. And do you think that you had a particular emphasis to the era of opera music or classical music that you promoted with—?

Ellis: My motto in presenting, if I'm presenting a class or a program of any sort that entails opera, my guideline is always *bel canto*. There's got to be some beautiful melody involved, as an integral component. Because that is what really speaks—talking about the animal communication—that speaks to the listener more, as far as I'm concerned, more than anything else. That is your reward. As Tom Lehrer loves to say about things like *Wozzeck*, you know, Alban Berg, the twelve-toners with all the falling down the steps with the dishes⁴⁶ [laughter]— So Tom always used to say, "Hum me a few bars of *Wozzeck*." Yeah, right. [making atonal, jumping pitches] [laughter]

Vanderscoff: So, something that really interests me about SCOSI is your orientation towards the enjoyment of the music, and then also expanding the audience to the music. Because I think sometimes there's a popular perception of opera, that it's an elite world, or that it's a world for the initiated few. And that's the culture that you get around a place like the Met or

⁴⁶ Berg made use of twelve-tone (i.e. chromatic) composition, a sort of modernist or avant-garde style that can sound more atonal or jumping than more familiar conventional major or minor scales, for instance.

something like that. But could you talk about that idea, and then the philosophy that you had, and with SCOSI, about who opera's for?

Ellis: One time, I happened to get in touch with Irene Dalis, who was the great mezzo, one of the great mezzos of her day. And when she retired—she had been born, I think, in San Jose—she came back to her hometown and she started Opera San Jose, which was for up-and-coming professional singers whom she could train. She did train them to be performing at a very high level of excellence. And that's what I love about Espressivo. And that is—in fact, let me take one second to go and look.

Vanderscoff: Here, let me unclip you from the [*microphone*]—

Ellis: Oh, yes, I'm still hooked up.

Vanderscoff: Yes, exactly, while you go seek this out.

Ellis: Yes, before I tear everything apart in your beautiful equipment.

[*going for the program and returning with it*] Unfortunately, I was not feeling well. I went to this concert, and I had to leave at intermission. So, I missed the last bits, which I really wanted to hear desperately, but just couldn't stay anymore. You know how I have to have the fan going to get enough air?

Vanderscoff: Sure.

Ellis: I didn't feel like I could breathe anymore there. That was terrible. [*hands program*] Anyway, here you can read about Espressivo and you can see what he's trying to do, what

Michel is trying. In fact, I wrote a little blurb for SCOSI. We do ads in each other's little programs or newsletters.

Vanderscoff: So, we're looking at the program of a very recent *Espressivo*—

Ellis: Yes, this is just September, what is it, 15th?

Vanderscoff: September 15th, [2019] just two weeks ago.

Ellis: Yeah, so I'll give you it to take and browse through it, until we meet again. I'd like to have it back, though, because it's the only copy that I have.

Vanderscoff: Of course. No, I see that you keep these programs going back, which is fabulous.⁴⁷

Ellis: Look in it. You'll see—well, these are my programs from the theater. So, they're really, really important to keep a kind of archive, a history of who did what when and all that. Although we do have videos; we make a video every year of the production.⁴⁸ And eventually, it gets on YouTube. And I believe that I told you that we had *La Cantatrice chauve*, which has had all of those views, whatever you call it. So that's exciting.

Vanderscoff: So yes—

Ellis: In fact, I don't know if I'll be up to it physically to do this twentieth year. I hope so, Cameron. I've been looking forward to it.

⁴⁷ Miriam's collection of programs on hand was extensive and went back several decades.

⁴⁸ In reference to the International Playhouse.

Vanderscoff: For the International, the Playhouse?

Ellis: For the Playhouse, yes, if I'll be able to do the French.

Vanderscoff: [*reading program*] Oh, I see here the advertisement, yes, "SCOSI enthusiastically supports Espressivo."

Yes, so I had that question about your philosophy of opera. It seems that you have a very kind of a popular way of looking at it, a populist way and kind of a joyous way. And I wonder if you think I'm reading that right. What's the underlying philosophy of opera and who it's for, underneath all of this activity you've done over the years?

Ellis: It is the culmination of the arts. It is a huge, never-ending, all-encompassing umbrella. Because when you look at the word itself, it simply means "works." "Opus," you know, you go to Opus 20, whatever, of Mozart, of whoever it may be; that means it's in this group of his works, is what you're saying. So, *opera* is the plural. It means "works." And indeed, that right there is the definition, because what do we have in opera? We have all of the concomitant factors that you have in theater, do you not? You have the text. You have the spectacle—there's the famous word. The movement, the characterization, the building of relationships between, among, if there are more than two characters in leading roles. Relationships, nuance, subtlety. You have dance. Let us not forget the chorus—the chorus, the importance of the chorus, of the other, of the one who sees and the one who reacts and the one who represents the public, to a great extent: the chorus. Then there's the other great art form, the music, both vocal and instrumental, to enhance all the theatrical aspects. "Dramma per musica."

I did a class not long ago on the chorus, by the way, in opera, its role and its significance and its importance for just holding the whole thing together—the pillars. So that is opera: it is the quintessence, the quintessential art form, because it encompasses all the art forms. You'll have the symphony orchestra's role in being a very full, a very brilliant, a very rewarding, a very satisfying, a very demanding—for the singers, sometimes—aspect of the whole performance. So, you have instrumental music. You have dance. You have all the features of straight theater, with all the magnificence and magic of music married to it.

That's why you can spend your whole life studying that art form. And you'll really never arrive at any fixed goal, because there is no fixed goal. You will never know everything about even one aspect of it. If you just look at, over the centuries, the role of the chorus, or the role of dance in opera—because it, too has had many, many manifestations, characteristics, changes, augmentations, sometimes diminutions—just that one little factor, among so many, many elements. You look at the importance of the so-called secondary players; the so-called secondary players are very much a part of the primary palette of everything that's going on, because they sustain, challenge, inform, sometimes destroy the main players.

In fact, I had this class for the Lifelong Learners. Since 2000 I've been teaching classes, in my retired state, for Lifelong Learners on opera, on various elements and various facets and various demands and various magnificent traits or functions of—I mean, it's like an enormous mosaic of what opera is. There's so much that goes into it. As I said, the culmination of all the arts: literature, theater, music, dance, interpretation, both musical and theatrical, which in itself is such a huge, unending labyrinth of discovery.

Vanderscoff: I'm really curious about that power in this community. I'm wondering, could you comment a little bit more about SCOSI as a town-gown endeavor?

Ellis: Well, a lot of SCOSI members are spectators at the opera presentations that go up every year on campus. They support that obviously, of course. They also go up to San Francisco, many of them. And a great percentage of them attend the HD Met transmissions that we have here on the mall [downtown Santa Cruz].

And the reason that that series has been brought to our little town, it was not in Santa Cruz until one of our members—I love to blow SCOSI's horn on that one—one of the members of SCOSI—who herself, by the way, was on Broadway in her youth. She's an ex-hooper in the musical world—you know, "hooper," an actress who dances. She was mostly in musicals in her heyday. All the Met HD fans who drag themselves to an opera performance at 9AM our time on a Saturday, an event being simulcast at a theater on the Mall. All these folks have Bonnie Liebman, who was in SCOSI at the time, to thank for working steadfastly for two years to conquer the bureaucracy in our area and the challenges from the Met side, to bring those performances here to SC. It was probably 10 to 12 years ago that Bonnie finally succeeded in her unwavering attempts to bring the Met here's she was a member of SCOSI until she decided to move to North Carolina for her husband's health. But I still keep in close touch with her. And it's thanks to her that we have the Met HD performances here. She left this town, but she left such a magnificent gift for all of the people who go to those performances. Although it's nine in the morning here, there in New York, it's twelve. So, they're in full matinée regalia, and here we're just about opening our eyelids. And they go down to the mall, and there's a theater on the mall. And the first words that the excellent manager, the then-

manager—they've changed managers many times since Bonnie approached them—the first words that came out of his wonderfully refined, sophisticated mouth, the first words were, “I hate opera,” [*laughter*] as a marvelous welcome to bring the gazillions of dollars that having the HD series at his theater has brought, by the way. They love the bucks—just hate what's bringing the bucks. Isn't that too bad?

Vanderscoff: So, the reason I asked that question about town-gown is because sometimes it can seem like there's a bit of a gap or a gulf between the university and the city of Santa Cruz. And it seems like the arts have a certain potential to bridge that.

Ellis: Yes, someone like Tandy Beal for instance, with her great programs.⁴⁹ She has done a lot to bring more appreciation of gown to the town. I can say that. And since I've been working with the Lifelong Learners, they have been recruiting more and more faculty from UC. The first person who started from the campus to work with the Lifelong Learners, offering voluntary courses, was a fellow named John Dizikes. He was the first one, and started by doing a class on poetry. And I believe it was female poets, which was a subject of one of his last books.⁵⁰ Dear John was the first one. He was the one who said to me, “Miriam, you should be giving them some opera classes.” Yes, and so I started.

And in fact, the very first class, Tom, John, and I did was a class for Lifelong Learners and students together—I think I told you that—on musicals, the American musical. The three of

⁴⁹ Tandy Beal, a longtime lecturer in dance at UCSC, has held arts programs centered on dance in the Santa Cruz area and in worldwide tours, including through her organization Tandy Beal & Company.

⁵⁰ *Love Songs: The Lives, Loves, and Poetry of Nine American Women* was John Dizikes's final book. For Dizikes's perspective on UCSC, see his oral history, *A Life of Learning and Teaching at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 1965-2000*, Cameron Vanderscoff interviewer and editor. Available online at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/24z7r5bh>

us team-taught it at one of the churches up there on High Street, as far as a venue was concerned. I've been teaching classes for them every year since then. John just gave up, actually, the year that he left us; he just gave up teaching for them. He taught for them probably about fifteen or more years.

That's a wonderful experience, to teach for people for whom you don't have to explain everything, Cameron, with all due respect. [*Vanderscoff laughs*] When I'm teaching students on campus, and I say, something like, "Oh yes, well he was wearing a Nehru jacket," I have to explain who was Nehru and what did his jacket look like, little things like that. When I'm teaching these older folks anything at all, I don't have to explain. They've been there and done that, right? That's such a nice feeling as a teacher, to be able to have a direct line to your listener, and a direct line of understanding without having to add words.

John—now that was a marvelous thing that he started, because now, we have all kinds of people, people whom you would never believe would be doing these kinds of classes because there's no remuneration. The branch of OLLI that we have, which stands for the—Osher is the family of philanthropists who finance the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. It's an institute. When I started with them in the earlier days, it was just called the Lifelong Learning Institute at UCSC. We were always allied with the campus, and used part of the re-entry facilities for things like mailing and copying, for clerical or whatever needs, the organizational needs.

From very early on, it was a town-gown thing. And now there are something like 700, or 500 to 700 members of our OLLI group. Among them, I have met, Cameron, *the* most marvelous, interesting people. I think Faye finally joined too, now that she's retired.

Vanderscoff: So, you're talking about these different areas of town-gown involvement. We've gone about an hour and a half, and so it might be coming towards a good place to close.

Ellis: Yes.

Vanderscoff: It's about four, I'm sure. But since our subject today, what got us into SCOSI and town-gown was theater on campus, I just wanted to ask, are there any other stand-out productions that you wanted to talk about in terms of on-campus theater? Maybe *Les Visitandines* or *Elixir of Love*, or if there's anything else that you think that you'd like to put on the record before we close this chapter.

Ellis: *The Elixir of Love* we did in the Workshop. What we did for that was a scene which is unforgettable. It's pretty much a long monologue—and that's the Dulcamara scene. Dulcamara, whose name is very ironic: means "sweet-bitter"—sweet bitter, not bittersweet. Dulca is sweet, like *dolce*, sweet; amara, *amere* is bitter. So, it's sweet-bitter. It's the name of the phony snake-oil merchant who comes to town to sell the elixir, this elixir that he has, which is nothing but good old French wine in a bottle with a fancy label and disguised, and given all the hullabaloo that he brings with him in his salesmanship. So, we did that scene, the Dulcamara scene, which is a very long, involved monologue.

I'm kind of proud of that translation, because it took a lot of thought to make it funny. It's supposed to be funny. I think it has its moments. For example, "How my magic potion will take care of—" I don't know, I don't have the text in front of me, but I do know that at one point, "Will cure you diabeticals, you hystericals," something like that. I did a way-out rhyme with trying to rhyme "diabeticals" with something that would go. No, there are a few in all the

translations that I've done; here and there, there's the glimpse of one that I feel a little proud of, with my huge ego.

The other one is "The Laughing Song" from *Die Fledermaus*. I think people liked it. I know that singers like it. Oh, that was another big production that we did. But again, it was not on campus. It was in town, because we didn't have the venue at UC. So, we did it at Harbor High School. I think it was in '79 that we did *Fledermaus*. We had very receptive audiences. I think we might have even charged for tickets for that one. I don't know. Somewhere, I have an old poster of it. It's a great piece. It's a real fun piece, and it was joyous to do it.

I've mentioned some of the scenes that we did: the *Carmen* scene, the *Orpheus* scene, the *Figaro*. We did do the whole opera of *Les Visitandines*. I mentioned that at the outset, the very first performances that we did consisted of two one-act works: *Gianni Schicchi* and *The Medium*. And we did the whole of *Don Pasquale*. [counting off] All right; so, we did *Visitandines*, *Don Pasquale*. We did a big chunk of *Elixir*, because a full-blown production takes more money than they ever wanted to give to the Opera Workshop. It always depends on the chair and on the dean and that whole bit—money, money, right? That was Sherwood's responsibility to deal with. There weren't many funds, I guess, to throw around. Maybe it's better today. Maybe they have better funding now for the arts—I hope so—than we had in those days.

Vanderscoff: What was your relationship like with other theatrical programs on campus? Was it like cooperation or more competitive for funding? Take Shakespeare Santa Cruz, for example.

Ellis: Well, Audrey [Stanley] was a dear friend of mine.⁵¹ I knew Audrey a long time.

Vanderscoff: That's what I'm wondering. Is there interchange happening between these different—the Opera Workshop, Shakespeare—

Ellis: The change that did happen was Shakespeare Santa Cruz— A fellow who was absolutely one of the heartbeats of SCOSI was named Gene Lewis. I believe I mentioned Gene to you in the past, telling you that I used to call him “Mr. Music” because he founded the Santa Cruz Chamber Players; he helped found the New Music Works, to show you his eclecticism. He was absolutely our music director in SCOSI. He would be the one who would go with us to the nursing homes, to the senior centers, to the schools. He or Patty, Patty Barton— sometimes both of them. Because we didn't have an orchestra, but we had a piano. Gene also played the lute, and he sang. He sang with Vicki very often, especially in our outreach programs, when we went out in the community to bring music to people who otherwise would get none.

Yes, how I thought of going to the nursing homes—you know, you go down Capitola Road, or one of the big, big avenues. We don't have that many big ones in this town. But right off there is a whole world of the shunted aside; behind those windows and those gates and those doors are all these lives waiting to end in one way or another, *Waiting for Godot*. How many times we went to those places, those nursing homes and those senior villages or whatever. They would cling to us when we were leaving, “Oh, take me with you, please. I don't want to stay

⁵¹ Audrey Stanley, longtime professor of theater arts on campus and founder of Shakespeare Santa Cruz. For her oral history, see, *Chatting with Cameron: An Oral History with Professor Audrey Stanley, Co-Founder of Shakespeare Santa Cruz*, Cameron Vanderscoff, Interviewer & Editor. Available online at <https://library.ucsc.edu/audreystanley>

here anymore.” Through SCOSI, Vicki and Gene Lewis, and Kathy Nitz, and Patty Barton performed for these mostly forgotten groups, for about two decades and I was happy to arrange the programs and introduce them. I am delighted that Vicki and her colleague continue to visit these kinds of venues, now mostly those located in the San Francisco area, to afford some measure of fine music and pleasure to so many otherwise forgotten individuals.

It gave me good preparation for what I’m getting ready for now, maybe. Who knows? I might end up in one of those places, although I don’t think so—I don’t think my kids will do that to me. If my health requires it, my oldest daughter will come up from down south, because she’s already promised to do that, if needed.

Vanderscoff: So, what was the meaning for you personally to play those venues?

Ellis: I had a great deal of pleasure to give these people a chance, because what we went back to was a lot of the repertoire of their happier days, of their more youthful times. And so, we would do things like, I don’t know, “Don’t Fence Me In” or whatever. You know, old classics, old standards, old pop music, “I’ll Be Seeing You,” from the war time, or “You’ll Never Know”—hits from the war times we would do. Or the waltz from *The Merry Widow* we would do. Or wonderful old songs from Rodgers and Hammerstein or Rodgers and Hart, or “Begin the Beguine.” From the forties and fifties, you know, the years when I was growing up. I remember so much of that marvelous popular music, and how much it meant to those of us who were left behind when our dear ones went off to fight, and that emptiness that needed to be filled somehow, and how music helped to do that.

So, we recreated a lot of good memories for people in the groups, usually. They asked us to come back quite frequently, so they must have gotten something out of it. And as I think I told you in our first meeting, Vicki still does this with her colleague up in the Bay Area, San Francisco. She goes to nursing homes. She goes to senior centers. She opens art exhibits. She does a lot of things like that to bring them— And when they want an African night, the both of them have a repertoire that goes from the Baroque all the way up to Miriam Makeba and whoever else is now ruling the roost in popular African music. Vicki has a great store of knowledge of all of that and a great deal of other folk music, in whatever vernaculars they're asked to entertain and to appeal to whatever audience happens to be involved.

Vanderscoff: How does it feel to you, as a mother, to see your daughter carrying on this work that you did?

Ellis: I love it! Are you kidding? I'm so thrilled. It's such a need and it's such a wonderful feeling that you get out of giving. You never feel as much reward as when you're giving some pleasure, even if it's one little hidden grasp of holding onto a cobweb of a happy instant, or a happy thought, or a happy feeling, to someone who's in not such a happy state of their lives. Isn't that a marvelous treasure, to be able to do something like that, to give that to someone? That is such a gift to you. This is such a marvelous thing. How can you even begin to value something like that? It's what we're here for, to help each other, isn't it? It says so in my book, anyway, to do some good or whatever we can for someone else, in whatever way that we can, be it a smile or a look or a question or a bit of music or a bit of a song or whatever.

The whole damn thing is so fragile and so short and so fleeting and so nebulous. And without the other, who are we? Not much. We're really not very much without the other. It takes the

other, right? It really takes the other. Even though Sartre, in all of his bitterness, "*Ce sont les autres qui nous figent et nous jugent,*" it's others who fix us, who create us and judge us—"*L'enfer, c'est les autres*"—and that's why hell is *les autres*, others. Because that is, indeed, a very true way of—one perspective, one way of looking at it, isn't it?

Vanderscoff: But you, at the end of the day, see it—?

Ellis: When one thinks of the kind of work that goes into producing, let's say a play with music—an operetta or an opera or whatever, or a musical—where you're judged on so many levels for your performance, and it can be damned; the whole thing can be just scrunched under the heel of some boot with a few words that give it a thumbs-down in a review, you know, just a few words or a nasty remark. So, there goes all of that effort and all of the sweat and blood and sweat and tears and agony. Well, that's all right. When you're in the arts, you have to know that you're fair game for getting ground into the dirt.

Vanderscoff: And perhaps that there's also courage in the expression; there's meaning in the expression, even if not necessarily in its receipt. [*laughs*]

Ellis: Absolutely. And it's also sometimes—if you want to stretch it that far, to be that egotistical about it—if you know in your heart of hearts that you have done the absolute best, given the circumstances that you found yourself in— You know, I say this all the time with student productions. [*laughter*] After all, talk about risk factor: *pretty* high. Yeah, we've had our share of *contretemps*, as the French call it, which means literally "against time," going against the tide of time. *Contretemps*, when something goes a little bit wrong. Well, so what?

So what? We'll try again. That's what we're here for, is to try and make it better the next time if we can. We've had our share of those experiences. with the Playhouse.

Vanderscoff: But I wonder—so just to check on, we're at about an hour-fifty. And so, I'm sure we're past four. So maybe before we talk about the Playhouse, this is a good space to break it off, because I think it's a beautiful close for this session, what you just gave.

Ellis: No, but I was just thinking that we have had our moments. One time we had, it was not even a student; it was a faculty member who was playing a part. The one and only time we did Greek. Because the young fellow who purported to be the director of the piece seems to have had a great penchant, and indeed brought them to fruition, for penises. And he brought phallic symbols on campus, on stage.

Vanderscoff: These were like phallic props?

Ellis: Yeah. Huge, huge things. Big, like five feet—each of the actors dragged one of those on. Even the female actors. Yeah, because I think he was trying to shock the old lady. I think that was their *but*, their goal.

Vanderscoff: You being the old lady.

Ellis: Me, me! You know, the bourgeoisie, to shock the bourgeoisie—that's a wonderful thing to do. Well, I knew a little bit about Greek theater, yes, I did know that they had used those phalluses how many, 2000 years ago? They had used those as just a means of portraying—but primarily, they were there just as symbols. It wasn't that every single character had to be dragging one on, as if it were a huge *fardeau*, burden to carry with him.

So, it was campy, college-level kind of campiness, trying to outrage. Well, where was the outrage? Hello? I always wanted to yell at him the first time I saw those happen at one of the last rehearsals. I wanted to say, “Well, you know, when you’ve seen the real thing, it isn’t quite the same,” or something like that. [*laughter*] I was going to actually say that, but I didn’t even want to give him the benefit of any recognition.

But I was getting to where we’ve had our moments, our *contretemps*. And that is, one of the people that this young director decided he wanted to use was one of our faculty in classics, and he had lines in Greek to deliver. He got onstage and completely froze—the look of panic. So instead of saying something like—in Greek, you know, he could have said, “Our sandwiches cost thirty-seven cents today.” He could have said that in Greek. Who would have known? Nobody. But he just completely froze. Not a word could come out.

It was very embarrassing, Cameron, to say the least. Because it wasn’t a student. Usually, if students freeze in our Playhouse, what they do, or what has been done by other languages, not all of them—two languages, I would say, two languages have done this in the past—the student turns up and looks at the overhead supertitles, which are in English. And that will cue, hopefully, some response of memory of what the Spanish or other language was.

Luckily, that has only happened a couple of times. The students have been very good about remembering their lines. But for this professor to have not had that much, what could I say, even self-knowledge or self-confidence or understanding of the situation, to even say the most ridiculous—he could have started one of the poems by Catullus or who knows, castigating somebody—or done anything! He could have let off a stream of invective, or done

anything! But at least if he had kept the Greek and just kept going, right? Rule number one: keep going, dammit. *[laughter]*

Vanderscoff: Such are the risks of the stage.

Ellis: Thank you! Of live theater, you're right. Yes, it was a risk, and unfortunately, it didn't go too well. But we haven't had too many of those. I think I told you the other day, the students who get involved in the Playhouse, if they aren't right at first extraordinarily motivated and serious about it, generally speaking, after a few rehearsals, they will get into the rhythm and pace and understanding of how very, very important their contribution is. Because we don't have any understudies—it's either you, or it's not going to get done. That's it.

So, this, at the same time, raises their degree of seriousness and sometimes will scare the bejeebers out of them, and they'll just drop out early on, hopefully. They say, "Oh, it's just too much for me. I can't do it." But we have been very fortunate with a great, great many of our young people hanging in there and learning, sometimes with great shock and dismay and maybe even disbelief in themselves—learning of what they're capable, and having that be the lesson.

That is one of the main objectives that I had in mind when I began this business of theater in a foreign language. To what end? What's the point? The point is to know thyself, right? Get in there, and see that you're capable of a whole lot more, than you ever even imagined. You can do it. And so, we do build some measure of self-confidence and discipline in the students who work with us. And several of them, I don't know if they're just being sweet and nice and

trying to make me feel good: “Oh yeah, oh, the best experience of my life.” You know, they’ll write these little accolades here and there about what it was like to go through this experience.

Vanderscoff: Well, that’s fabulous, Miriam. And I have some more questions—

Ellis: I remember that when we did the Molière—remember I was telling you the other day, we did Molière, which one was it? I think it was *L’Amour médecin*. Or maybe it was—no, it could have been—?

Vanderscoff: *The Imaginary Invalid?*

Ellis: Yes, we did that one, too, but this was *Ecole des femmes* (School for Wives or Women.). I got this young fellow, I think he might have been a junior already, though—but he had never done any theater, and certainly never in French. He wrote quite a while afterwards— I asked some of them to “Please, just”—because I was trying to write an article about the history of the Playhouse, of the whole notion of using theater as a tool for foreign language acquisition, as they call it, FLA. And he wrote, “Just imagine what it was like: here I had to learn, I had to memorize not only all these lines”—because he had a very big part—he said, “but they were rhymed couplets and alexandrines.” Which meant that you had to give six syllables in the French, then a slight pause, then another six syllables for the same line, so you had twelve: that’s an alexandrine line. “*Allons, Flipote, allons,*” that’s six syllables. And that’s a hemistich; you stop. “*Que d’eux, je me delivre*”—there’s another six, so that’s twelve. That’s one line. “*Ô, ma mère, vous marchez d’un tel pas qu’on a peine de vous suivre*”—there’s the rhyme. So, in the end, it’s actually easy to learn, because you have the rhyme to rely on, to hang up on.

But anyway, the student, Ben, wrote this about his experience with facing a text with which he was, of course, not familiar, and the rigors of not only interpreting and understanding, but then memorizing and interpreting it in the sense of making the character live. He did a very good job. He turned out to come back, I think, two more seasons. That was Ben who wrote me that—Ben Lilly wrote me that. After that role, he played very, very different characters in two prose plays, modern ones.

But he found out that he could master something as daunting as that first role—within a few weeks, too. We have maybe four weeks to polish the text before we go into final week, tech week rehearsals. And then we go up, and it's over. So yes, time's of the essence. So, we need students who really have the gumption, enough self-confidence to take a stab at it. That's what we need—we need them to try.

And Renée, my wonderful co-producer. For about the last six or seven years, I have had the immense, great, great fortune to have working with me a marvelous colleague from French, who actually joined the faculty after I had retired. I did not know her. But at least since 2012, she has come to all of the performances. About three or four years ago—well, it could have been in '15 or it could have been in '13—maybe it was six years ago Renée started to help me more and more with productions. Now she is my heartfelt colleague upon whom I rely as co-producer. She's getting to learn about directing and becoming a co-director in the French, now. She's just amazing—the amount of energy and dedication and seriousness of purpose with which she takes the Playhouse.

When I no longer can do it, I am so blessed to be able to hand the torch on to her to continue with it. I do hope that she will do that, because she gets precious little in the way of

remuneration to do it, believe me. She gets, I believe, one course relief from her huge load of courses, which is not much of a monetary reward. I demand so much patience of her and understanding. Just putting up with me and my craziness, that's enough for somebody to get a huge bonus with many, many zeroes, I'll tell you. *[laughter]* Because you know, I very often just take off somewhere into the ether, and we need someone that can say, "Hey, here's the earth. Come on back to it!" Yes, yes. That's Renée. She's wonderful.

She has all of the requisite rationality of a well-trained French mind, a disciplined mind, and the ability to stick to a subject and not go off on twenty tangents at once—like guess who does that? Yeah. And to get done what needs to be done, when it needs to be done. She does most of the recruitment, because I'm no longer on campus. So, if the Playhouse is to continue, it's a matter more of getting personnel involved in it, than anything else. That includes faculty who are willing to take a chance.

In the folder where I have the programs, I have the very first program which is, I believe, a real treasure.

Vanderscoff: Well, I wonder if this might be a good place to break before we go deeper into the Playhouse.

Ellis: I think it would be a good place, because where did I put my glasses? Did you see?

Vanderscoff: Oh, well they can't be far. Here, I'll turn this off just for now. Then we can pick up next time with the Playhouse. *[recorder turned off; as Miriam reviews her programs and begins to speak about them, it's turned back on shortly thereafter]*

Ellis: [*reading from programs*] —the sponsors. "Comic theater pieces in five languages." Okay, so I had colleagues. Look, in Chinese, Jacqueline Ku, who wrote her own—she had been in the theater at home in China; she had been in theater, so she knew about Chinese theater a great, great deal. And so, if we could even find the first— [*thumbing through programs*]

Vanderscoff: The program.

Ellis: There, but that's German.

Vanderscoff: Yes, this is—

Ellis: And this is Japanese. There's the other person who's been with me since the beginning, and she is fantastic. This is Sakae Fujita. And here [*indicating a program*] she did the Kyogen school. This is the fourteenth century. She is one of the few people in the whole country who even knows about Kyogen theater.

And this was my dear colleague in Italian, who took—

Vanderscoff: [*reading*] Papa's Going On TV, *Papa Va In TV*.

Ellis: It's hilarious, this thing. Papa's going to be electrocuted on TV. [*laughs*] Isn't that wonderful? That's his stint on TV. Trust the Italians to come up with that. He's going to be a big star, Papa, as they push the button. [*laughter*] That was our very first essay into Italian theater. Then *Chinese Hip-Hop*, she called it—that was written by Jackie Ku. She was—well, you have to read it. You can read it. Would you like to take this to read it?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, would that be all right? And I'll come back with them.

Ellis: Yes. Yes, please, because it's the onliest one I have. So, it would be nice to bring it back.

Vanderscoff: Well, I'll bring it back with some specific questions, as well.

Ellis: Yes. So that was the very first one.

Vanderscoff: Fabulous.

Ellis: And we got—this is, I think I found one program of the second performance [*indicating program*] We were still at Cowell, yes. Because we moved over to Stevenson not too long afterwards. What did we do in the second one? I don't recall.

Because we started out the first one with five languages. And I think then we started to go to four more often—although we did seven once. And then we did eight in 2012—we had eight languages. That was really crazy. That's where we had the Greek—

Vanderscoff: The infamous Greek.

Well, good. I have more questions about this, but we've gone— Do you mind if I unclip you here?

Ellis: Yeah, please do. Go ahead. [*Vanderscoff removes the microphone*] So how are we doing? Oh, my goodness, 4:30.

Vanderscoff: Oh yeah, we clocked a good two hours and change.

Ellis: We did! How about that? Cameron, you have to stop talking so much. [*laughter*] That's the trouble with you! I can't keep this fellow quiet. [*laughter*]

[When the recorder turns on, Miriam is discussing some of her key colleagues and inspirations]

Key Colleagues and Inspirations

Ellis: —another, a great deal during my experience on campus. And I've started to make a list of, for example, the directors who participated—

Vanderscoff: I'm going to clip you in.

Ellis: Oh yeah, here we go.

Vanderscoff: The familiar ritual by now.

Ellis: Yes, pretty familiar. That's right, poking around there with the apparatus, which, I hope I haven't blown out any tubes or—

Vanderscoff: No, not even, nope.

Ellis: —batteries or whatever you run out of. It has been, gosh, what are we going on, for our tenth hour today? Something like that?

Vanderscoff: Close, yeah, probably ninth.

Ellis: Yeah, ninth, tenth hour. Seems a long time—I filled the air with so much blah blah. Really, who on earth is going to be interested in any of this?

Vanderscoff: They are out there. They are out there, I assure you. You have one right here.

Ellis: “*They*” are out there—well then, you can use the singular, unless you've now become royal. [laughter]

Vanderscoff: Over the last week, yeah?

Ellis: I don't know. It just seems to me like a tremendous blathering of very uninteresting morsels of data that may perhaps fit into some kind of a picture—if they are put together, I don't know—as to the ruminations of an ancient person who— [*looking at her phone*] Oh, new voicemail. I bet this is your voicemail, telling me you're going to be on time.

Vanderscoff: It could be.

Ellis: So that would be my list of [*indicating her list of key colleagues*]— But you don't really want anything in writing—I mean, that's the whole point of this thing. But there have been people—for example, I did the category just of, I'm going at “Playhouse Pillars.” And that means people who have really been integral to its existence. I think I've said this many times already, you must be tired of hearing it, that we're going to have our twentieth anniversary this May. Because we started in 2001; that was number one. By the time we get to 2020, it will be our twentieth anniversary. It's a hell of a time for me to feel as if I don't know if I'm going to be able to be as involved as I always am. It takes a tremendous amount of strength, energy, vitality, concentration, motivation—all of those good things, you know. And I am right now still waiting to hear the result of an exam yesterday. I had this echocardiogram. And I have not, of course, yet heard what the result was.

But as my daughter, my oldest is—I think I've told you—the nurse who lives in LA, she said, “If it was anything drastic, they wouldn't have—” Because my next appointment with this cardiologist is next week. So, she said, “They wouldn't have put you off for a week. So, it can't be that there's anything too serious.” So that's nice.

Vanderscoff: Very good. I wonder, before we dive—

Ellis: Very long-lost memories that go down so many different pathways—I don't know if they ever reach any kind of objective. Probably not. They just roam around. But you do have very good talent for that—

Vanderscoff: Thank you, Miriam.

Ellis: —for which I salute you, for being able to, quote, “probe” without seeming to be too aggressively, obnoxiously busy-bodying.

Vanderscoff: Prurient. [*laughs*]

Ellis: Prurient, that's a nice one.

Vanderscoff: Well, that's good. Hopefully, we can maintain that balance today and through the rest—

Teaching

Ellis: I think so. Now, you asked me about my lecturing.

Vanderscoff: Well, I was wondering if we could start at the beginning of your lecturing job. I'm wondering if—so you graduate with your PhD in 1979, I just wonder what your sense of your horizons were at that time, and then how you came to get the job that you did.

Ellis: Well, the profession of teaching languages other than English—to make a very broad generalization—but this has been my experience, and it seems to have happened quite regularly, to the point where it feels as if it's quite cyclical—and that is that language learning

and language studying and inculcating in the general, larger public a broad interest in acquiring other languages is very political. It's based on many factors in the entire world. And of course, since the advent of the computer—and I never got around to telling you this, but I started studying computers with the very first Mac— Before, we only had UNIX on campus, and then the very first Mac came along. It was about like that big or something, real tiny.

Vanderscoff: Like a foot by a foot, you're sort of indicating.

Ellis: And this wonderful person who was giving me lessons on UNIX—which I thought was such a complete blend of ego tripping with no basis in rational thought, because they had all of these combinations of acronyms or abbreviations that did not seem to mesh with any logic. I mean, for “repeat” you think they'd have something like “rpt” or something. I don't know what it was, but it was not that at all. In other words, it didn't fit what you expected in their scheme of making these symbols that you had to memorize in order to make UNIX work. I don't know if you're familiar with it. Which is going back now to, let's see, when was the first Mac, about? Was that—we're talking about seventies or eighties?⁵² I don't really remember at all.

But I do know that this fellow, whose name was Dan Wenger. The humanities, I believe, had hired him to give instruction to the faculty in computers, to learn something about computers. And in fact, that print-out that I have about the NEH—I may or may not have shown it to you—was an early manifestation of computers. I believe it was sent out via email

⁵² The first Mac personal computer was put on the market in 1984.

to some extent—you know, where they're still referring to CATS. We were still called CATS [Computing and Telecommunications Services] at UCSC [cats@ucsc.edu] in those days. Some people still write to me on CATS, way from way back.

And slowly but surely, we got to learn more and more. So, when the Mac came out, and Dan said to me, "How would you like to learn this new computer that just came out?" He says, "It's very user-friendly, in the sense that you don't have to memorize a whole slew of new symbols, but it's really based on very logical and easy-to-comprehend grounds in order to work your way through it." And he was right. I have been with Apple ever since, I should say. I recently bought even an, I don't know, it's about my fourth or fifth desktop. I don't have a portable; I just have my desktop still.

At any rate, Dan was very helpful, and he was very encouraging to me. He helped me get the idea of starting a little project, which I called French Phonetics for American Speakers, which I wanted to try, for people to do on the computer. And with that, I had my dear colleague, David Orlando, who's one of the two top people on my list of those who have made my life at UCSC very livable, very rewarding in so many ways, and enriched. The other person is Faye Crosby, about whom I think I told you.

So, I would say David Orlando, whom I met when he had just finished his dissertation—and he came on campus, and I think it was either '71 or '72, because he had just finished. The first time we met, he had a full head of lovely hair. Now, it's somewhat, shall we say, slick—or, for a quite number of years, it's been a bit slick up here. [*patting the top of her head*] But inside that cranium is a wonderful personality: very affable, very accessible, very other-oriented, very generous of soul and of spirit, and extremely collegial and fair. For many years, he was

given administrative roles in the domain of lectureship, because he has excellent people attributes, people power. As I say, he's other-oriented to a very great extent, quite self-effacing in many ways, and always ready to listen. That is one of his marvelous traits.

And he really does listen. So often in meetings, everyone would be yammering away, and David would be sitting there, very quietly just taking it all in, maybe sifting through it and doing a synthesis. Because at the end of the meeting, which had been mostly vapid and vacuous, he would come out with something so perspicacious, so right-on, so revelatory—having taken in the important notions that had been set forth, or the individual concerns that had been expressed, whatever it was. He would be able to synthesize the elements of importance in those points and make the meeting have a bit of interest and meaning and even positive aspect to it, when there was something positive to be expressed. There was not always something positive. Many times, there was not. But still, when there was, he would put his finger on it and share something positive with all of us. So that was David.

I believe he finally did attain security of employment in his later years and he acted as the chair of the language committee. It was called a committee in those days; then they [departments] were called boards, but since we were non-tenured people, we were always a committee. We never quite made it to a fancier title than that.

Vanderscoff: So, you graduate with your PhD. And so how did you come to get the lecturer job in the first place?

Ellis: I had already been TAing since the first day I arrived on the scene, since I had been acquainted a bit with pedagogy. I had been at San Fernando Valley State for all those years. I

did my BA there. Then I did my master's there. I think I told you, way back when we started there, I established that Office of International Programs, so I had been also involved in the administrative aspects of the institution there. I had had some classroom experience teaching on the way up here and there, TAing or whatever it was. I was involved in the classrooms.

So, the first day, pretty much, that I arrived here on campus, they gave me a TA-ship. And not only did they give me that marvelous title of incredible remunerative value [*inhales and makes a dubious face; Vanderscoff laughs*], but I was thrust into the classroom because I was "older," quote unquote. I've always been older than everybody else; [*laughs*] it looks as if that's been my fate from way back when.

So, I was put into a classroom to teach French, and I had little or no supervision whatsoever. I kind of knew what to do, right? So, I started right away. I had already gotten to know people in French on campus, of course, because I was doing classes. I was going to meetings and if they had some little social event, they would invite me to come too. So, I got to know all of my fine colleagues even before I became an actual part of the group. Then when I started to do all of the theater work, they really came to my assistance and recommended students and really, really were supportive, because they loved the idea. Then we had all kinds of other little things that we established, like I think I told you, *La Foire française*, the French Fair, which was a one-day annual event where we had all things French culturally going on. We even got them to make French food in the cafeteria that day, some kind of a French menu. They would have some nod at making something Frenchy, you know, just the flavor of it.

And then, because we had among our colleagues the wonderfully gifted Hervé Le Mansec. Hervé was already deeply involved in the French diplomatic corps. He had on his license plates, in fact, a “DIP” or something, so the cops never stopped him, even though he used to drive—he lived in San Jose, and he used to drive [Highway] 17 back and forth all those times. And they didn’t know what to make of his plate, so they didn’t stop him. So that was good, because he was not always—you know, the French are not, shall we say, the most careful drivers in the world, to be generalizing but true.

So Hervé was very well-connected, not only with the diplomatic corps, but he was a great operaphile and a great opera critic. He wrote consistently for *the* French magazine that deals with things operatic, which is called, brilliantly, *Opéra*. That’s the name of the publication. Hervé was a correspondent for them, a roving critic. He was assigned all of the western part of the United States. So, he would go to such things as the—there’s a festival, is it in New Mexico? It’s in one of those westerly states. I think it’s in New Mexico, but I don’t remember exactly. Santa Fe, would it be in Santa Fe? It might be. And then he did Seattle when they did *The Ring*; they would do *The Ring* almost every season. Hervé would go up there, and he would write beautiful critical reviews of the performance in French for the magazine.

And I must mention the fact I have had the marvelous honor and joy of being Hervé’s translator, for about the past fifteen years. When he writes a piece of critical narrative, it is such a joy, Cameron. This goes back to my love of the written word, the word and the use of it, and the artistic ability to use language in imagistic and metaphoric, in very original ways. Hervé has that talent in spades. He’s such a gifted writer. His discourse is on so many different levels at the same time. He thinks nothing of throwing in not only an Italian phrase,

but one in Latin or in Greek or whatever comes to his capacious mind. Sometimes there I am having to figure out, “Now how am I to put that in ordinary English?” It’s a great, great challenge, as I say, and an honor for me to have Hervé’s confidence to render his work in a way that’s fitting and not an insult to the level that it deserves to be rendered.

And there is this group in Paris with an on-line. Periodical that has been around now, I believe they’ve just celebrated their twentieth year. It’s called ResMusica. I don’t know if I mentioned this to you, R-E-S-M-U-S-I-C-A? *Res* means more or less “on the level of,” or what is the “now-ness” of something.⁵³ ResMusica is the name of it. You can just look them up. And you can look up Hervé Le Mansec, if you learn how to spell his name. And you can read the translations I’ve done of many, many of his articles on ResMusica, if that’s in your interest.

So now, Hervé, who has retired—he retired probably a little bit after David and I and another of our colleagues, Patti Fitchen.⁵⁴ All three of us retired at the same time; it was 2004, I think, we all retired. Hervé was here for another year or a couple of years, and then he retired, as well. Since his retirement, he moved to Southern California. He lives not far from San Diego, not far from Palm Springs, in a little town, I believe. So that’s where he retired.

We are very, very much in contact, very close contact, with Hervé and David. David lives in Santa Cruz and part-time in San Jose. He’s got his parents’ home there that he inherited. So, he goes back and forth between Santa Cruz and San Jose. But we are very closely in touch, as well. We all keep in touch. The beauty, Cameron, the miracle of collegiality that the French caucus shared—there were seven of us, and there was never any sniping or fighting or small-

⁵³ Miriam is referring to the meaning of “res” in Latin, where it most literally means “thing,” but can be more broadly construed.

⁵⁴ Patricia Fitchen was a lecturer in French at UCSC throughout the 80s and 90s; Fitchen retired in 2004.

minded kind of altercation that took place within this group. We all just meshed into each other's life experience and character traits so well. It was such a marvelous and trying time, because we went through many, many crises of different sorts, in terms of, what is a lecturer in language expected to do? We are expected, somehow, to teach eight courses, rather than some other committees—or should I say now “departments”—which require only six courses of their lecturers. But we are given the task of doing eight, which means three, three, and two courses. Three courses in a quarter is relatively inhuman. It's so difficult when you have numerous papers all the time, like I did. I gave homework at every single session, and so there were written pieces to be turned in. So, my whole career as a lecturer was spent either in the classroom or grading papers.

Vanderscoff: Why did you have that especially high course load in French?

Ellis: For all lecturers in languages. Because when this campus was founded, our founding fathers—and there were no founding mothers, as far as I know—our founding fathers had—we were not there, but we heard that they had the impression that language acquisition was a skill, not an intellectual pursuit. Of course, language acquisition seems to come with a *tiny* bit of baggage, which is called culture. And to separate one from the other is well-nigh impossible, fruitless, and foolish, to say the least. So, it's a very broad and remarkably rich vein of academe to pursue.

And then, if you like certain particular aspects of the culture, as Hervé and I both love opera, right—that immediately made me very close with this young man. I didn't meet him until Ionesco was here, and we had a reception for Ionesco at one of the lit professors' homes. That's where I met Hervé for the first time. I remembered hearing, through my students in

adult ed, about his classes, because he was teaching classes at Cabrillo as well to earn some extra money. And he had an eight o'clock in the—can you imagine that horrible hour—at eight o'clock in the morning, he had a class. All of the lovely old ladies in my adult ed class would tell me about this astonishingly handsome and charming young Frenchman who was giving these classes at that ungodly hour—which they never missed, mind you. So, I got to know about Hervé before I met him. And then when I met him, I could see what they had meant. He is extremely outgoing, charming—well, all the diplomatic skills. Wrap that up with all the French charm, which can take you quite a way in some areas of our American society—you know, “Oh, I love your accent.” Hervé hears that all the time.

So Hervé and I, and Gildas Hamel, that towering intellectual who was a classicist, a Bible scholar, an ancient historian—and one who's trying to keep his native dialect of French going, because he's Breton. He's from Brittany. So is Hervé. They're both from Breton, from Bretagne, one of the northernmost pieces of France. But they're so different. Gildas was brought up on a farm, and he can do absolutely—and not only with his brilliant mind, but with his brilliant hands. He built a whole extension onto his house. You know, little things that you don't exactly, that not just anybody can do. But on the farm, he learned so many skills, and knows so much about so many, many different areas—and really *knows*.

Vanderscoff: So, you have this great team of people. But you were saying that the UCSC founding administration considered language a skill.

Ellis: Yes, like a dummy English—you know, they used to call it “dummy English.” When you came, you had to take a special English class because you hadn't learned English—it's another language, isn't it?—well enough in high school. Because when I was young, way back

in the antediluvian days, we had to learn grammar coming out of the ears—how to diagram a sentence. Do you even know what that means? You have to break it up into its component parts linguistically. And then you have to make a *schema*, a scheme to show how these words, this particular phrase, if it's a phrase, or a clause, depends on this word. What is the relationship? In other words, analysis, a really deep analysis of the structure of a sentence or of a piece of writing. If I say a predicate nominative or a copulative verb, terms that sound like they're from some kind of a recipe for a fancy dessert or something, most people have never had anything to do with grammatical foundation these days. It's so sad.

Well, I believe that is how the study and the teaching of language was looked upon. You really shouldn't quote me on this, because I wasn't there when they were debating it. But this is the impression that we got: that if people wanted to learn a language, they could go to Berlitz and learn a language.⁵⁵ That was very far from the idea of openness and flexibility and curiosity and imaginative studies that I talked about, as what I thought—perhaps mistakenly, perhaps idealistically, perhaps wishful-thinkingly—that this campus represented in its earliest days.

I know that when someone proposed—I think it was at Stevenson—that they offer a class, I don't remember, was it in Arabic? It could have been in Arabic, or it could have been in Urdu or one of the northern Indian languages. I don't recall. But that was jumped upon. They took that as a really interesting thing.

⁵⁵ Berlitz Corporation, a language education and leadership company.

And we have Punjabi. Two years ago, we had a section of the Playhouse devoted to Punjabi, because we have international students from the Punjab; on campus, we have quite a band of them. The woman who was teaching the classes wanted to be part of the Playhouse, so we did a section of the program in Punjabi. That was a first for us, to have that language on the roster. It was very exciting to have them and to find out a little bit about their ways and their culture. They presented a bit of the music and a bit of the poetry and a good discussion of the culture and the whys and wherefores of their society. It was a nice, exotic addition to the program.

Vanderscoff: So, you mentioned that there was this founding attitude about languages, but, of course, that you weren't there for the founding. But how did you see that institutional attitude about languages manifest itself when you were lecturing?

Ellis: Well, we always—whether properly, whether correctly, whether paranoically or not—we always had the perception of being second-class citizens on campus. In fact, we were never technically even referred to as faculty but rather as staff, which was a blow to the ego, of course. One would think one would be considered part of the faculty if one was teaching classes and writing evals, and giving grades, finally when that happened. But that was perhaps a misperception on our part in the hierarchical world of the university. In fact, one professor of literature once looked me right in the eye—and I was probably as old or older than she was—and she said, “Miriam, you are not hierarchical enough.” I didn't tell her what I really felt. I said nothing to that. There was no rejoinder to that. But what I felt was, “Listen, at my age, I really don't have to come groveling and crawling on my knees anymore. I've been there and done that.”

I was using age as a cudgel, or as maybe a shield, or whatever. But especially in the early days, in the seventies when I got here, Cameron, everyone was so incredibly fresh-faced and young. They all looked like they were seventeen to me. I was already in my forties. I was, after all, a mother of quite a band of teenagers at that point. So, it was hard for me to be all that formal with everyone else, in the sense of the notion of hierarchy. And I did have so many of the same, perhaps not *all* of the renown, but I was invited to give papers at conferences.

I did put together that NEH program, which had received national recognition, by the way. I think in some of the literature that I may or may not have shown you, it was discussed how this professor, Frank Ryan from Brown University, used to travel the country and inspect or visit and receive information about the extant “language across the curriculum” programs at the various institutions. And he thought that, when he came to our campus, that we had the most well-developed program because we had not only, as in most places, grad students teaching language courses—you know, that’s the norm—but we had professional language people, people whose emphasis was the imparting of language, which is not the easiest subject to inculcate in essence. We did have some bilingual students who had the notion of code-switching, of being able to express an idea in more than one sounding group of words, but for the most part, sad to say, American students or Anglo-speaking students are deeply dedicated to English and English only: “If it was good enough for Jesus, it’s good enough for me.” You’ve heard that one, I’m sure.

Vanderscoff: So, you're painting a picture where it seems that there was a thriving language community here. But what I'm hearing is that in some ways, that was in spite of, rather than because of, institutional support.

Ellis: That's very perceptive of you. And I think that your utilization of that contrast is very well-founded, yes. *Malgré, malgré*—the French have a wonderful one word, *malgré*, which means in English, you have to say “despite” or “in spite of.” Or “just because,” “as a reaction to”—that's *malgré*, right.

Vanderscoff: So, what were some of the ways you did that then, you and the other language lecturers. What were some of the key ways you built that successfully?

Ellis: We did a lot of cultural kinds of things, as I said, in French, of course. And with Hervé being so connected with the diplomatic corps, he would bring—in French, we did a lot. He would bring speakers to campus. And until we evolved so that the French lit people started to want to do something broader, and they started that *Littérature française vivante*, Living French Literature, bringing people to campus. That was a wonderful appendix or enhancement, enlargement of— Imagine a student is studying, let's say, I'll pick on Nathalie Sarraute, a kind of new age novelist who, to be very reductionist, one of her principal themes was—am I standing on you [*the microphone cable*]? I'm sitting on you—

Vanderscoff: Oh no, you're fine with the cable, fine.

Ellis: —was the idea of *tropisme, tropisme, trope*; was the idea of a vine that has to touch something, clinging, clinging. So, in broader terms, it's the notion of the other. But even broader, broader terms, of communication, of touching the other, of being relevant to the

other. So that was one of her basic precepts in her style and in her approach to storytelling or narrative or whatever.

So she, Nathalie Sarraute, came one May and I got to meet her. A very fascinating person. So, imagine if you're an undergrad student and you're reading a piece by Nathalie Sarraute, and here she is, in person on campus. You can go up, and you can talk to her. You can say "*Bonjour, madame, je m'appelle*" so and so, and so on. And, "I just love your work," or "I don't understand a word. What are you talking about?" Imagine having that possibility. Wouldn't it be lovely if we could go wake up, I don't know, Charles Dickens or Walt Whitman or anybody, you name him, and just say, "What did you mean when you said—?" I did that with Ionesco. I said, "What happens at the end of *Rhinocéros*?—" this marvelous play of his, *Rhinocéros*. I think I mentioned it to you, where everybody turns into a rhinoceros. Of course, he got the notion at a Nazi rally, where everybody turned into that kind of a rhinoceros.

And there is one character—for Ionesco, he represents every man. He named him Bérenger. Bérenger is the only one who has not turned into a rhinoceros at the very end of the play. He has a long monologue and it's marvelous. He goes through the whole notion of, "What is this idea that I'm talking French? What does that mean? If there's nobody who can understand or answer me, what does it mean?" So that's a good question. If there is no other, is that communication? You're talking to yourself, talking to the air, talking to the world. The importance of the other—I think that was one of Sarraute's ideas, too, was the notion of the other, through her *tropisme*, her idea of clinging and reproducing yourself or manifesting your existence by reaching out. Because a vine has to reach out, and it has to touch something.

Vanderscoff: What did you hope it would mean for UCSC students to have access to a strong language program and access to these different modes of communication?

Ellis: We were getting to be with the computer, with the growing, extraordinary importance of the computer. It was becoming to me so, so apparent—okay, everybody’s going to learn English. But are they really? What kind of English are they going to know? What level? And look at how much more armed, particularly now, when the world is becoming so small—and this is in the eighties, maybe even the early nineties, I don’t know—to know something of another person’s language, just being able to greet them, just being able to say—

I don’t know if I told you, but the first thing I did when I went back to school and Vicki was two, in ’57, was to study Russian. I studied Russian at night. I think we had two classes a week. It was *very* difficult. Not only is the alphabet crazy, in the sense that they have many symbols—for example, they will write what looks like a written “p,” and it’s an “r” sound, just to drive you even more crazy. It’s not bad enough that you’re trying to figure out what that letter is, but the sound of it doesn’t look like our “p” sound, just to really confuse you—just a small example. So just to learn the symbols, learn all the symbols and the sounds and so forth. And then the structure of the language is very strange in the fact that it’s extremely basic: [*in Russian inflection*] “Ja, professor—vy, student. No verb “to be.” I Tarzan, you Jane; I teacher, you student. So, the verb “to be” is understood in the context of your expression. There is a past tense of “to be,” but not a present tense. There’s also, I think, a future tense, but not a present that’s used a lot. It exists.

Anyway, so I studied that, how many years, fifty years ago?

Vanderscoff: But you started in '57, which is the peak Cold War, peak Sputnik years.

Ellis: That was why, yes, absolutely. That's why we tried to attract international students to campus. We tried so hard. Because I think I told you that the Russians used to bring as many foreign students from around the world as they could to Russia. Pay them a stipend, pay for all their expenses, make sure they had housing, people to watch over them, take care of them. Really, really, they got very aggressive with their foreign student program.

Vanderscoff: So, if you flash forward to UCSC in the eighties or the nineties, and return to that question of what it is that you hoped this would mean for American students at UCSC, to have this exposure—

Ellis: I was really hoping—and we did, we started to get, we had some wonderful field programs. Vicki went to Mexico for several weeks on one of the field programs from Merrill, where she studied the music. Music is one of her loves. She studied one particular segment of their folk music in that time, in a concentrated manner.

They had a lot of field programs. They had, of course, the study abroad program. And then we established, thanks to one of our colleagues, Patti Fitchen, who had the brilliant idea of starting a study abroad program in French, which we did in Nîmes, which is a small city not quite in the south, but going southward from Paris. That was a lovely program where we chose—fifteen to twenty students would go for one quarter. And listen to this wonderful thing: one of the French caucus members would go along and do two quarters of French in one quarter. So, they would study French five and six, the last two quarters of the second year, in one quarter, living with a French family who had a very marked *accent du midi*, a

southern drawl, in a way. Because it's so close—closer, not so close—but getting closer to Italy. So, there's a big Italian influence in that area. Yes, the students had quite a time, moving in with a completely unknown family and being in a completely unknown country with different customs. So that was a great program.

In '85, Paul and I went. We took care of a group of, I think I had fifteen or eighteen students. I don't remember exactly. But they were wonderful students, our students from here.

Vanderscoff: Yeah, I see here [*on Miriam's CV*] that A, that you're over there, and then that also you were very active in the EAP selection committee for France for years, and also in the Fulbright Committee.

Ellis: Oh yeah, I chaired the Fulbright on the very day—oh, I shouldn't even mention it. I should not mention, we're too close to October [17th], when we had the biggie. What was the year, '80-something, '85?

Vanderscoff: The earthquake? That would be '89.

Ellis: '89, yeah, '89. I chaired the Fulbright committee, came back to my office. It was five PM. I got on the phone, and everything started to shake. I'll never forget that one. I dove under the desk, because everything on the shelves started to fall, all the books, all the papers, everything. But I dove under the desk and it was a big desk, and luckily, very sturdy. So, I didn't get hit by anything.

Oh, you *do* know some of my past, which I've almost forgotten.

Vanderscoff: Well, I'd love to hear about some of your work on the EAP committee or the Fulbright committee, as a way of thinking about some of your involvement with international language exchange work.

Ellis: Well, I remember that distinctly because there was a student who had come for interviews that day, and he wanted to go to Chile to study the earthquake activity there. And Big Mouth said something like, "Oh, why don't you just hang around here?" [laughs] He wouldn't believe that. You can't say *I* brought it—I just mentioned that we did have them in California. That was a tremendous frightening, frightening experience.

And we stopped doing that after, let's see—Ionesco was here, what? In '79, I believe. I don't know, but they abandoned that Living Literature project, I guess. I think they brought—you'd have to look that up—but they must have brought four or five extremely noted writers in different areas. As I say, Sarraute was a novelist. Ionesco, a playwright. And then they brought a poet, whose name now escapes me. I didn't meet him, I think. That's three that I can recall. Probably David will remember more. I can ask David. He is such a fount of knowledge and recalling. He's got marvelous recall, which I don't have, by the way. In fact, I told him, "Listen, when I'm doing these interviews, I might have to call you up sometime and ask you for some date or some detail or some bit of information that I have forgotten." He remembers the names of different deans and chancellors. Well, he was much more active as an administrator than I was, that's why.

Vanderscoff: But it does seem that you were on a good range of committees and chairing different committees. It seems like you had an active civic life, in that sense, on the campus in these years.

Ellis: Oh, yeah. I think I was already at Cowell when I was asked by somebody, the vice chancellor or somebody, to be on some committee or other, which I did. And then we in languages, we had our committees, too, that were functioning as administrative groups. Like we had the curriculum, something-curriculum committee was one.

David, of course, is the one who knows all of that. First Hervé was chair, I believe, and then David was chair. And when David got to be chair, I think the dean told him that he could choose someone to be co-chair with him, to help him because we were writing all of the things about—there was a new language studies major being proposed. And David and I were both very instrumental in trying to get as many language courses involved, so that it would not become blatantly a linguistics major to the detriment of having at least a good knowledge, a really good foundation in one language, and hopefully a strong element of another language, a second language as well.

Again, I don't remember all the details, but I do remember that we had quite an adversarial time of standing up to the ladder faculty, who were in the position of power, obviously, to make these decisions as to how many courses we would require in language and what would we require as an exit, for example, on the undergraduate level? And that's how I got to be in charge of all of those—at one point I was doing about eight or ten different translations; I was advisor to a big number of translation projects that students wanted to do. That was extremely time-consuming, because it's very one-on-one, working with a student. In that endeavor.

That was how I met Marieke Rothschild, because she was doing a translation project in language studies. I befriended her because she was all alone on campus. She was an older

student—I think she already had her two children and had come back. I so empathized with that, having done that much earlier and knowing how difficult that is, to be mother of a growing family—especially at a very tender age; they were still very young, her children—and for you to be a good student. She was an excellent student; she was really an outstanding student. She had a European, rather stringent preparation for studying, in the way that they used to do. I don't know if they're still doing it to that extent in Europe, or if they've become more Western or more Americanized. I don't know. But I suspect that they're still pretty demanding. I mean, if you know anything about the French system, the *baccalaureate* is absolute hell to go through. Students lose weight. They lose sleep. It's a wonder they don't all get very sick from the stress of preparing for the *bac*. Well, it used to be—I don't know if they've toned it down in recent years. I haven't kept up with those sorts of details. The European mode was always much more demanding in the educative process.

We wanted for language studies, for those who were going to be doing this new major, to have a very strong exit requirement—be it some kind of really intensive study of something, an intensive paper, or something like a translation project. Or we could administer one of these horrendous exams across the board. But if you were doing French, for instance, we could not usurp any of the territory of the literature major in foreign literatures. We had to be careful with that.

So, there was a lot of work that went into the preparation and the carrying out, early on, of the language studies major. I don't know what it has become. I have not kept in touch. Probably, again, David has a better idea than I do, because these are the sorts of things that he would be on top of.

Vanderscoff: So how did you go about negotiating those politics, dealing with the ladder faculty in linguistics, the ladder faculty in literature—

Ellis: It wasn't easy, I'll tell you. It was pretty hard. We had to stand our ground and say, "No, they absolutely have to have six quarters. They have to finish the full two years of language learning in order to take upper-division courses and do well in them." And then finding enough upper-division courses (because we always had these budgetary constraints) upper-division courses in the language, which was why I started the FLAC business way back then. But that died an untimely death. We know that that would have fit in perfectly with this notion of language studies, to be able to say, for example, "I love psychology. I would love to take a course about the French psychologists," of which I'm sure there are many who have contributed quite a bit to the realm of psychology, and who have written things that maybe have not even been translated, that students could peruse. That would have been a perfect fit for a language studies major. And I was an advisor for language studies when it began, for several years, as well.

I had many majors under my aegis, to the point where, as I said, sometimes it got ridiculous. I had so many different things going on at once, besides a full course load—or maybe by then I could have had a little, maybe I got some course relief for being the co-chair. I might have had that from David. That would have been the last year or so only, of my tenure there, my work there.

Vanderscoff: Another thing that I see, looking at your CV, is a lot of independent studies. What were those like in those days?

Ellis: I got into a lot of trouble with one of the many deans who passed through in those days. He got very upset because students would come to me and say— In case you didn't notice, or in case I didn't put it in that many words, Cameron, I love students. And I get—like I'm some kind of a vampire, I get a large dose of energy, of motivation, of *joie de vie* in being around them, in being able to work with them, in being able to listen to them, in being able maybe to help them in some ways with their lives or with their thinking, or with their *modus operandi*, or what have you, with some decision that they have to make. I guess it's just a maternal instinct spread a little broader. I don't know what it is, but that's the way it is.

That's why I keep going back, year after year. I was called back to service in '05 for no recompense. I didn't want any. I don't care about that part of it. I care about being able to work with this wonderful, and for me refreshingly—every year, a new group shows up. Sometimes a few of the previous ones come back. They're so full of life and energy and hope and ideas and creative notions and willingness and warmth. For me, that is the motivation behind all of this.

The Playhouse is an enormous amount of work. I would say it's concentrated, I believe the quarter usually begins something like April 2, until we go up, which is generally, anywhere between May 15 and 20 is when we generally go up for those three or four performances. We did three last year, 14th to 17th of May, in that area of time.

Vanderscoff: So, you were saying that you had a particular interaction with a certain dean over a certain student.

Ellis: Yes. So, what happened was, for independent studies—this campus was started with singular independent studies with one person, or a group independent study, where you could have five or six as a group and do an independent study that was of interest to all of them, in some subject. So, when we started with language studies as a major, or even before that, I would have students come to the office—I’m just thinking of this one grad student, I never forgot him, John something—I don’t remember his other name, but I think it was John something. He was a French lit major, and he said, “I’m going to apply to grad school, and I’m really at a loss.”

Because what happened eventually with French literature, they mostly did away— You know, French literature begins—the idea of “French literature,” quote unquote, begins in, I think it’s the ninth century, *Les Serments de Strasbourg*, the “Declarations” or the “Oaths.” *Serment* is like the word sermon in English.⁵⁶ There were two brothers who were emperors, kings, whatever they were—rulers—signed these protocols together, which declared something about “that each as a separate unit is just as important as the other.” I don’t know exactly what the details were. That’s considered the first piece of “literature,” quote unquote, in French history. So, we’re talking ninth century. It could have been the tenth—I may be wrong. But it was even before I was born. [*laughs*]

So, when you want to be a French lit major, you must start with Medieval French. You have to start in the Middle Ages, work your way up very nicely, fourteenth, fifteenth—that’s where you start to get to the Renaissance in Italy, it gradually leaks over into France. Then we get

⁵⁶ *Les Serments de Strasbourg* are one of the earliest texts written in a “Gallo-romance” language. They date even earlier, to 842.

into the sixteenth century, which has a remarkable amount of great poetry and some excellent theater. Then, of course, you get to the real jewel in the crown, and that is the seventeenth century, which has my favorite, Molière, and it has Racine and Corneille in the tragic part of theater.

Then you get to the very first psychological novel in French literature, written, of all things, by a woman. And it's called *La Princesse de Clèves* by Madame de Lafayette, was it?⁵⁷ I don't know, my brain is going. See, I'm forgetting little things like that. Anyway, it's a wonderful short novel. Brilliant, brilliant style, and psychologically already—and we're talking 16-something when it's written.

And you have all the culture of Louis XIV's court in so many different areas. Then you get to the century of the thinkers, of the philosophers, and that's the eighteenth, and everybody from Rousseau up to Voltaire. And you have the encyclopedia being put together, which is an amazing feat to put that all together, this encyclopedia of all the knowledge of the time. You have Diderot doing his big part in putting that together. So that's only one century, the eighteenth—and many, many other great thinkers and writers in the eighteenth. I'm not an eighteenth-century specialist. The seventeenth was mine.

Then we get to the wonderful nineteenth, and that is the Romantic era, where we have Stendhal writing for his, quote, "happy few," unquote. Now, he's worldwide-renowned. And then we have the twentieth, with all of the angst and the horrors and the searching for

⁵⁷ While it was published anonymously, the book is generally believed to have been written by Madame de la Fayette, who was friends with and related by marriage to the Marquise du Sévigné, a renowned letter-writer.

meaning. I don't know very much at all about the twenty-first century, what's going on in France in literature these days. Don't keep up with it, can't—aren't enough hours.

Vanderscoff: But you were speaking sort of the particular challenges of studying French literature, and then how that related to—

Ellis: Yeah, but studying French literature in my day, like when I did my master's exam, I had to know all the centuries in French, starting with the Medieval and working right up until the twentieth. And so, we could have devised an exit exam like that in language studies. But we couldn't, because what's happened in the literary realm of academia, at least on this campus, it's all gone to criticism, or most of it has gone to that. They've done away with studying those ancient texts.

So, this fellow John that came to see me, said, "Look, I'm a French lit major. And I want to go to grad school. But I find that I'm lost. I have no background. I've never studied du Bellay"—du Bellay just comes to mind, wonderful poet.⁵⁸ "I have no background." He had not studied Montaigne. He had not studied Montesquieu. He had not studied Diderot. He had not studied Rousseau. You know, any of the centuries where you name a famous French writer, he had not studied any of that.

He said, "And I particularly love the nineteenth century and the Romantic poets." He said, "And one that I really, really would love to study—but they don't give any classes in these authors." This must have been early 2000, late 1990s when this fellow came to see me. And

⁵⁸ Joachim du Bellay was a sixteenth century figure.

he said, "Could you possibly give me an independent study and give me a little bit of background because I really, really want to study the poetry of *Les Fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire."

Baudelaire is wonderful. He's not easy. He's not easy at all. But he's wonderful, so enriching. "*Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune.*" Two images that put it all together, when you're talking about loneliness. "I am an abandoned cemetery"—you know, decrepit, run-down cemetery—"forgotten by the moon." Even the moon doesn't come to this cemetery anymore to visit. Talk about loneliness and aloneness in two images, just a little bit like that.

Nobody was teaching Baudelaire. So, I said, "You know what? Sit down." I had *Les Fleurs du mal* right on my shelf, and I lent him my copy so he could start to read it. I said, "He was too radical. He talked a lot about sex, about all the things you were not allowed to talk about." Which, of course, the Romantics wanted to do anyway, because they were the Romantics, and their whole notion was rebellion against classicism, which, classicism connotes universality. It's classic, like the Greeks and the Romans. That means it still applies to us, and applies not only to us, but it applies to all of mankind, the whole world, the whole planet.

And what did the Romantics say? "I'm tired of this everybody's-put-in-the-same category. I want to express me. I want to express my feelings. I want to express my ideas, my own thoughts." That was like me with that paper that I wrote that I told you about, that he threw out. [*laughs*] Because I wanted to talk about—because I'm a Romantic, what can I do? There we are, all ego tripping.

Vanderscoff: So, you start teaching him Baudelaire in French.

Ellis: Yeah, so I gave him an independent study on *Les Fleurs du mal*. I don't know how many we did, because there are too many pieces. But we zeroed in on some of the principal ones and at least had a taste of that. Then I gave him just little bits and pieces. "Middle Ages," I said, "Oh, you have to look at blah blah blah. Renaissance, oh, absolutely." And I had whatever books that I could share with him that he could use.

So, the students would come by. They would come to me because they needed more background, especially those who were very serious and wanted to go on but did not have—I had, when I was doing my undergraduate work, I had it drummed into me, century by century, the panoply, the endless— And not even mentioning all of the women writers that existed in France since the Middle Ages. Even in the Middle Ages, there was Marie de France, her name was, her pen name, Marie de France. She wrote in a new style of poetry, I believe it was; she wrote the lai; she wrote beautiful, wonderful things. She was, as usual, just a woman who was living because her husband was rich enough or whatever. Then he had the nerve to die and leave her with young children, and she had to make her own living. So, she started to write, which was an enormous, bold, nervy, audacious risk to take, to try and make a few whatever, francs, sous, whatever. Wonderful.

Vanderscoff: So, in some sense, these independent studies sound wonderful, because you can tailor something to individual students. On another hand, it seems like a lot to ask of the lecturer. So how did you manage the workload of that, plus the other courses that you were teaching?

Ellis: Well, because I didn't have to go back and start studying the material from word one. I'd already been there and done that in the past, so I had a smattering, at least, of knowledge

of what it was. With Baudelaire, I could—as Tom Lehrer would say, “Want me to do two hours? No problem. Ten minutes? No way, can’t do it. Yeah, right.” So, with Baudelaire, I can drag out *Les Fleurs du mal* and just go, “From this poem he leads you to that poem. And then what about the one, this sensuous—” They loved the sensual ones, of course. [laughs] The students really got interested in those.

Then we got to people like Rimbaud, who was just a bit too explicit about certain, shall we say, proclivities that existed among male lovers. I remember this young woman came to the office for an independent study. She was going on about what Rimbaud had said in this rather, shall we say, pornographic statement, [laughs] which was lovely. I said, “Oh, that’s very poetic. Those are very nice images going on there.” I was doing the stylistic approach, not a textual analysis of that particular moment. Oh, they loved to shock me, the old lady. They always loved to try and shock me. Well, I told you about the student who did the Greek with those phalluses. That was a clear attempt just to shock me right down to the floor somewhere. [laughs] I think it would take a little more than that, somehow, to shock me.

Vanderscoff: So, it seems that you’re interfacing with the students in a lot of ways. And another one is the question of—could you talk a little bit about what it was like for you working with narrative evals, the workload of that and the purpose?

Ellis: Narrative evals—well, after writing 10,000 of them, you get to have—I know when computers really started to come in, people just made themselves outlines and then filled in names or whatever details. I never did that. I always wrote them from scratch. I mean, I’m sure I would repeat some adjectives, because it’s true of a lot of people: affable, ebullient, conscientious, dedicated. People are people, after all, and students are students.

But I liked to try and at least put in something that was remarkable or individual about this student, if there was something that made— Sometimes, very frankly, I would have Kristina, Krissy, Kristian—they were all six-foot tall with long, beautiful, blonde hair that was parted in the middle and combed straight down. And then I had to try and learn which was whom. And I always used to tell them, “*Vous savez qui vous êtes,*” “You know who you are. You don’t need me to tell you who you are.” [laughs] But one time, I was calling—I think there were two fellows that were either the same name or very similar names. I used to always confuse them. So I would apologize for that and they knew the dotty old lady. [laughter]

But also, Cameron, another really hilarious thing, those were the hippie-dippy days, yippie hippie dippy yippie. One student came to my class and she said her name was something like Aurora Golden Thorn or something. You know, it was some beautiful name: Aurora Golden Thorn. She did the whole class, and I would call her Aurore, Aurore, which is a beautiful French name, means “dawn,” right? Then you get these sheets at the end of the quarter, grade sheets, where you’re supposed to put down if they passed or didn’t pass in the old days, and then grades in the newer days. So, I get this sheet and it has a name on it that I don’t recognize at all—I don’t know, Millie Dougherty or whatever. It could be whatever you want—I don’t know. A name that, “No, I don’t have anyone like that in my class.” So, I put F next to it; you know, fail, because I never saw the student.

Then the phone rings in my office. “*Madame Ellis, c’est Aurore,*” this is Aurora. “But my real name is” whatever I said, Maggie, Maggie Dougherty, whatever her real name was. So, I said, “It would have been nice if you mentioned that little fact to me before now.” So, I had to change the grade and go through the whole bit. But those were the days when students

would give themselves names that they liked, not necessarily that their parents had given them. But it didn't always jibe with what they had on their record. So that took some getting used to.

I used to do the independent studies as much as I could—provided there weren't other students who wanted to see me—during my office hours. Because that was a good hour, sometimes two hours—depended. But yes, I did have a lot of independent studies, simply because I felt like we were short-changing those students by not giving them at least the notion that this richness exists, and then they can explore it. But first, they have to know that the treasure is there before they can attempt to take advantage of it.

I believe that, sad to say, this is now the mode, or was for a time. I know there were critics who were writing articles about how bad it was not to give students the basis of this knowledge, which, after all, is centuries old, centuries of thought and of use of the language. As I told you, I did French and Spanish lit, both. And when you look at the ability—or even if you look at Shakespeare or at Chaucer—the ability we have, from our twenty-first century posit, to look at that text and be able to make it all, very rapidly make it meaningful to us, to have it be legible and be understandable, be accessible, be worth looking at and thinking about— English is further from old English, or at least—maybe it's a very shallow observation. I'm good at that. But it seems to me that the early French is more accessible, compared to modern French, than the early English compared to our English today.

There's a marvelous, medieval writer, Chrétien de Troyes, Christian of Troyes was his name. He wrote pretty much the saga of the Knights of the Round Table. He wrote about Guenièvre, Guinevere and Lancelot, for instance—Lancelot, her lover. He was a fine writer, but not that

accessible because he's more dialectic, more dialect than the conventional French, what became the conventional French. But he's very well worth knowing about and reading in the Medieval *genre*.

Vanderscoff: So, you're painting this very involved picture of lecturers in the work of the education, of the university, and in the day-in, day-out task of mentoring and educating students. You also were involved in a lot of these committees. And so, I wonder, what were the sorts of pressing issues for lecturers in those days as far as securing job security, institutional recognition? What were the challenges that were faced by lecturers?

Ellis: All of the above, because we were considered, out of hand, as temporary. That's the unkindest cut among the unkindest cuts that I mentioned. That's one of them. And when we had that six-year rule—

Vanderscoff: I've heard about a rule of about that length, six years or eight years or something like that. But please say more about it.

Ellis: I think it was six. I think I told you that both Hervé and I had fulfilled our six years. And we were actively interviewing people to come and get our jobs, which was not the most fun thing I can think of to do, to say the least.

Vanderscoff: This was a cap that said you could only be employed for this—

Ellis: It was a cap that said—oh, wait, I didn't finish. There's another little facet of it that is even more, shall we say, deprecating. And that was: you finished your six years and then that was it, not only for whatever UC campus you had been involved with for that six years, but

you could not apply to any other UC campus for a job as a lecturer. It was six years, and you're out. That was literally exactly when the union came in. The first thing the union did was to negotiate, and succeed in negotiating, the elimination of that heinous rule.

Because what would the justification be? That they'd have to pay you a few, I want to say shillings—that's the wrong currency—a few pence more a month or a quarter? I guess it all probably came down to money. I don't know. I'm not in the administrative realms of thinking. What was the justification? You'd think that if you gave someone who had been a novice in starting, let's say a new PhD, who had never taught or had that kind of a demand on time and energy, and just physical stamina to do eight classes a year—and that person is just about coming into full understanding of the limits, the limitations, the broad perspectives possible, the places to ameliorate, the places to refurbish in their pedagogic approach, the kind of work that maybe they could specialize in that would make them a little more significant.

For example, one of our lecturers in French, Angela Elsey, came from—she was born, I think, in Louisiana, and Creole was her specialty. There are many, many different sorts of Creole, to the point where, when I got the NEH grant, one of the first classes that we offered was Creole from her area, which she offered with a linguistics professor. She taught it in tandem with someone who also had studied Creole as part of his linguistics background. And she was approaching it from the pragmatic, having used it as a lingua franca in her area. So those two taught that class together. I think they repeated it. I think she taught it more than once with him.

So, we had people, even just in our small group of seven—as I was telling you, Hervé with all his contacts in the world of diplomacy and culture—he brought speakers here. He brought

writers. He brought artists here. He brought all kinds of people here to give lectures to enrich our French program and the experience of the students. That was Hervé. Then Gildas, with his absolute insatiable areas of knowledge and understanding. He's a wonderful teacher; they love him, Gildas, because he cares about the students very much, too.

And Patti—Patti, the ebullient Patti! She was a theater person. And she played—I think I told you this—she played, in English, *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, one of Giraudoux's great plays. She played that leading role in English. We had a small regional repertory company called The Bear Republic theater, or some group that was, I think it was in the valley. So, she did the role, the leading role for them in their version in English at the same time that I, in my French theater—that was the French theater days; that was the nineties, before we started the Playhouse. I did scenes from *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, but in the original French. Patti played our crazy lady, because "*la folle*" means the madwoman or the crazy lady, or the weirdo, the Miriam. [*laughter*] And of course, she's not crazy at all. She simply wants them not to destroy Paris, because they think they found oil under Paris and they're going to dig up the city

Vanderscoff: She's the secret hero. The madwoman is the secret hero.

Ellis: *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. Chaillot is a section of Paris, a neighborhood in Paris; one of the *arrondissements* in Paris is called Chaillot.

All right, so who else was there—

Vanderscoff: You said Hervé. You said Gildas.

Ellis: Yes, so Patti was a theater person. And again, oh, the students just loved her, because she's similar in temperament to my daughter-in-law; whatever comes to mind, it's on the lip. She'll tell you. "Cameron, you look wonderful today." Or "Cameron, you look tired today." Or "Cameron, go and get a night out. You look tired of living. You need a change." That's Patti. Now Patti's very straightforward. They loved her, too. The students all loved Patti, because she was—

See, that's the thing with lecturers; that's the other problem we have. We are, first and foremost, and I would say almost always, with, and for the students. That's what we feel is our mission in life, is to help to form some little area, part—even if we light the tiniest little flame in one far-gone, far-reaching corner of the soul of this individual, that will have been worth everything, worth all the hours, worth all the tiredness, worth all of the looking for *raison d'être*, you know, "Why am I doing this?" Because burnout is a very common illness among lecturers, by the way. As I said earlier on, it's primarily because you're not really accepted as a full-blown member of the respectable community. You're just kind of an afterthought.

I started like that at UC as a grad student, already second class, right? And I seemed to have remained in that same ID my whole time here, to some extent. But it's really a shame for something as potentially remarkable an environment as a campus can be, to have classifications, to have labels. You know, the word for label in French is interesting. It's *étiquette*; *une étiquette* means a label. You put an identity. What did Sartre say? You know Jean-Paul Sartre? *L'enfer, c'est les autres*; hell is the others. Them, the "them" out there, that's hell. *Ce sont les autres qui nous figent, et nous créent*; it's other people who fix us, who create

us. Now, look at those who engage in any manner of presentation, whether it's a salesperson or an arts person of any sort, a creative individual, leaving it up to the judgment of others to reinforce their existence—or to even identify them as existing, right? That was Sartre's notion of hell.

Also, lecturers have evals, evaluations all the time. I guess that comes from the six-year rule, one of the vestiges of that. I don't know. I don't remember those details. That's one for David, again. I would have to ask him. But you come up for review quite a bit more frequently. Actually, I used to give them a sheaf of papers with all the other things that I was doing besides the teaching, because I still was doing my community work and giving lectures off-campus at different places and giving, doing—

Well, when I retired, or just before I retired, I think it was in 1999, or maybe it was even in 2000, John Dizikes and Tom Lehrer and I put together a class for the Lifelong Learners. The students, I think they were some Cowellies. I don't remember exactly who the students were. I think maybe they were enrolled in one of John's classes or an independent study. But anyway, they came and took our class. We gave a class on American musical theater, and we even had members of the class participate. I remember I directed a scene from *Of Thee I Sing*, that great musical. It was Tom's idea. Tom played the piano for us and helped them learn the songs. It was really fun—it was a great class. The students loved it. I don't know if they loved being mixed in with the old timers, but they really loved John and Tom. You can imagine—they were so great in the classroom.

And we would have “big fights” all the time about opera, because Tom ostensibly hates opera, and John and I love opera. So, we'd have big fights about that all the time. And the students

love that, when the profs have fights, right? So, I got started working with the Lifelong Learners before I actually retired from here.

Vanderscoff: So, you found connectivity with some professors, right? And as a lecturer, you're doing some co-teaching with some professors.

Ellis: Oh yes, yes, of course.

Vanderscoff: But so, I'm wondering about that picture, what kind of—

Ellis: Oh, that was marvelous. I taught classes with John at least—for the NEH grant, I taught, as I can recall, one that we called *Comedy and Culture: A Serious Look at a Light Subject*. Something like that—he subtitled it like that. And then with Tom, we did this one about musical theater I told you about already. Then I did a course with John alone after that, on opera. We took, I think, five or six operas that we were going to analyze and go deeply into with the group. So that was a third one that we team-taught that comes to mind.

And then did I mention Offenbach? Yeah, we did a course on Offenbach. We called him “the progenitor of the absurd,” because I wanted to link Offenbach with Ionesco. And in several of his works, it's very apparent. He did just a tremendously satirical take-off that was hilarious, and he got away with doing it so brilliantly. It took two foreigners, actually, when you think of it: Ionesco, who was born in Romania, and Offenbach, who was German. So, it took two foreigners to come to Paris and show them what they really looked like through the funny-looking glass, through the absurd. You know, it often does take an outsider to see natives much better than they can see themselves, because the outsiders become aware of

certain frailties and discrepancies and perhaps idiocies. And they can observe it with a not-jaundiced eye, from their perspective.

So, we did that class together, the Offenbach class. That was a pleasure, too. Oh, it was so wonderful to work with him, Cameron. We had such a blast together, really. He had such a great sense of humor. And I wrote in one of my doggerel poems when he hit eighty. And I talked about the only two things we ever fought about: that was Wagner and Maria Callas—those were the two things we ever fought over. There are worse things in life. And I did know John from the time that he joined the Opera Society, which was back in the maybe late seventies, early, mid-seventies. We started in '76, so it must have been the late seventies, yes, that he joined us, and all the way up 'til— I have a book that I showed you; I showed you that book, I think, that he sent over here ten days before he left us; he sent it with Ann and Helen, who came to deliver a book from John that he wanted me to have, *The Victrola Book of the Opera*.⁵⁹ It's probably a collector's item, a very old, wonderful opera book. And when he wrote *Opera in America*, he put something so sweet in the dedication, the acknowledgment, about SCOSI, about the Opera Society. It was so sweet. The members of the group were very touched by his comments.

I have a folder somewhere in there [*indicating her programs and old records*] devoted to him and pictures of him and Tom, because I invited them to lunch frequently. They would come over and we'd have lunch, or we'd go to Tom's condo, and have lunch together. It was so great. What did Tom call us? "The Terrible Trio," he used to call us, "The Terrible Trio is getting together again." Now I told Tom, "Well, we're down to the Dastardly Duo, I guess.

⁵⁹ John Dizikes passed away in December 2018.

That's it, yes." So, great, such great memories. So much happy laughter. You know, when you're together with old friends, you don't have to even talk much. You can just feel the fun things that are aching to come out. [*quietly*] Never mind—you can't go home again.

But definitely on my list of people who have meant a lot to me on this campus: John Dizikes. I put down here [*indicating her list of names of inspirations*], "both from SCOSI and our team teaching and the NEH experiences we had together." And then Tom Lehrer, I said, "team teaching and enricher of my life," which is so true of Tom. You've only got to spend ten minutes with him and you're laughing about something. Either one of his horrible puns—I'm always chastising him for his puns. He loves puns. But he has such an eclectic and encyclopedic memory of trivia, of details, and of people, and of events that occurred that are so funny and so clever. He's such a joy. And he's such a good-hearted soul, a very generous soul, dear Tom.

Vanderscoff: So, we've gone the good piece of a session. But just, before we close out, I just wanted to—

Ellis: UCSC has been very good to me, despite my low-class ID, in the sense that I have had the freedom to undertake all of this nonsense I've been talking to you about for the last who-knows-how-many-hours and making you have to put up with all the minutiae that come with each of the memories. It's just because of my comrades, my colleagues, of the time that it was, of the atmosphere that there was—and of the downright luck, I guess, that I had in not being completely shunted aside and told, "Oh, Miriam, go stand in the corner and shut up"—which they well might have done to me—"and stop thinking up these crazy things to do."

Vanderscoff: Because you were saying that, in other words, the six-year rule was changed right at the moment that it would have pushed you out.

Ellis: Affected me and Hervé, two of us, right then and there. So, it must have been—I don't know, you must go back to my CV again and look at dates and details, because I don't remember the dates. But whatever, six years were passed since they had actually given me some kind of a contract—because they were one-year contracts, I believe I told you. You were only employed for one year. And every year, you had to see that famous letter that arrived, usually just when classes were starting; you would get a letter, the coincidence, the serendipitous arrival of that letter, just when you were getting ready to start the quarter, which told you that, “Don't think this means anything, then. For this year, you're hired. That's it.” In other words, “No plans, please.”

Vanderscoff: And you mentioned that you think that David Orlando got security of employment. What sense did you have of the prospects for any kind of greater job security beyond one-year contracts in your own career?

Ellis: I don't know. David had done, as I told you, had shown his great skill in being an administrator, and of keeping the language program—which consists of people from all of these different cultures, having all of these different worldviews and experiences and cultural kinds of expectations, perhaps. You know, it's not an easy herd of cats to keep quiet, or to keep without internecine battles of all descriptions. Who knows what—they went back and forth.

Again, David Orlando is the one that I can tell you, I can easily—if you want to write to him, very easy: And you can please tell him I've mentioned your name to him, I've said, "Cameron." So, if you are interested in following up on any of the administrative realia of the language program, he is the one who really, really knows. I may have given you bad or wrong or misleading or nonfactual information, because I'm only coming at it from my fragmented memory. I was really, really not involved until the very end as co-chair in, you know, being involved in writing all of these official kinds of papers, statements, or reports, or whatever.

I was not involved actually in getting the Playhouse endowment. What happened was I met one of the, as I said, probably the most important person I have met in all my years on campus. And that was Faye Crosby, who had, by some magic quirk, the impression that the Playhouse is something worthwhile supporting, and even trying to expand or make sure of its destiny. And she, as provost of Cowell, obviously, moved in very different circles from mine, and put together a series of dinners, which were completely planned and executed and carried out very, very successfully. They were French dinners with a French theme. She recruited a whole team of marvelous people, and I guess made them drink the Kool-Aid, because they thought the Playhouse was worth putting out this extra, absolutely incredible effort.

Because it was magnificent, Cameron. I can't tell you—I only wish it had been videoed. We went to the provost's beautiful house, and there was this very large table—I think there must have been at least twelve guests, I'm not sure. And these marvelous, mostly all women—not to be sexist, but that's mostly who created and carried out this magnificent project—prepared, first of all, did all the planning and the shopping and the production of these

marvelous dinners. I think there were three of them; I think they repeated them three times. And they charged an inordinate amount of money for somebody to come and be a guest at those dinners. For me, it was unbelievably, impossibly expensive. My God, my jaw went down to there [*indicates ground level*] and stayed there the whole time during those dinners.

I think there were three successive—probably one a month or something—I don’t remember those details. That’s Faye that knows all of that only too well. She was there. And she got this other Faye, whom I knew from the Lifelong Learners, Faye Alexander, and from SCOSI—she’s a member of our Opera Society—who is now, I think, touch wood [*tapping on an end table*], 102 going on 103, I believe. Faye Alexander, a brilliant, wonderful human being, so vivacious, so full of *joie de vie*. That’s the secret of her longevity: she believes in living life and enjoying it. Can you imagine that posit? What a stance. [*laughs*]

So, I called them, the two Faye’s, my, *mes deux fées magiques*, my two fairy godmothers. Because the word *fée*, f-ée, in French means “fairy.” It is pronounced just like the English “Fay.” “So, the two Fayes, that’s what I called them, *mes fées magiques*. Because Faye Alexander never, she keeps telling me over and over, “I never asked anybody for money in my whole life.” This is the first time she became the big fundraiser. And in the back of the Playhouse programs, the later programs, you can see that we were putting out lists of the people who had given to the endowment. It came to about a hundred people. [*scrolling through her papers*] Ended up, oh, I don’t know—it’s not in this Program. This is about the students more. But I’ll have to look for one of our more recent ones, I’ll show you that, where there’s a list of all of these people who gave to that endowment. The wonderful Faye Alexander, went and asked people. My dentist gave. [*laughs*] I see my dentist’s name on there! I said, “How did you

even know about him?" Somebody knew somebody who knew somebody who knew the dentist. You know how they do it—it's a small town after all.

All of these people gave money for that endowment. I'm telling you, there were about a hundred names on the list by the time they got through. That was remarkable. And it was thanks to those two Fayes and the team they put together. There's a marvelous sculptor, female—a "sculptress," I don't like that term—but a wonderful woman sculptor who took part in this outstanding effort. Among her awesome talents, Marianne is a top chef, and she valiantly did all the cooking for these sumptuous meals. In addition to all of that priceless work, she gave a gift of one of her lovely sculptures as a prize or memento of the dinners. Everyone contributed their work and their skills and their time and their effort so beautifully. Faye enlisted the skilled help of Angie Christmann to get a group of students involved, too; they were at Cowell and came to help serve and clean up and carry out all of that vital work. Each of these occasions was a delight, thanks enormously to Angie and her workers, as well as to everyone who was involved in the planning, preparation, and production. I will never forget the joy of those dinners and want to express my deepest appreciation for every aspect of them and to all who were involved in their striking success.

And then Faye Crosby told me, "Well, you have to perform something for the dinner guests," she said to me. So, I tried to memorize the lines of all of the roles in the first scene of *Tartuffe*, one of the last plays I did in the French theater. I made and gave Vicki a new English translation, so I would do a bit in French, then she would read the English, and so that's how we got through that scene. It was strange, having to perform there, before many who didn't understand a word of French, but if that's what Faye wanted, I was only too happy to try to

comply. I hope it wasn't too incongruous and uncomfortable for the captive audience, but we were in the living room, not in a theater, after all.

So that was those dinners. It must be, four or five years ago that all that happened. I don't know. I lose track of time. And it was Faye Crosby, whom I shall ever, ever revere, and Faye Alexander, both of them together, doing that. That was town and gown working together very closely on a common but extraordinary project.

Vanderscoff: That's beautiful. I think that's a good place to leave the session for now, if that's all right.

Ellis: Pardon me?

Vanderscoff: I think that's a good place to leave the session. We've gone about two hours.

Ellis: Oh, is it? Yes, I think it's a good place to stop, too. Because now you see that after I'm gone, which might be this year, the Playhouse will have some kind of financial support to continue. I do hope that it will be able to continue, not so much for anything else than as for what students have gotten out of it, in the sense of, "Know thyself." They have come to know that there are other possible characters living within themselves that are waiting to be brought to life. It could be a peasant from the Middle Ages, or it could be a crooked lawyer—who gave all lawyers, [*laughs*] also from the Middle Ages, in one of the first French *comedies* called *Maître Pathelin*—which, again, is from the thirteenth century. And there's a real *Maître Pathelin*—*Maître* is master, Master Pathelin. That's the title they gave lawyers. He's a real crook. He's a real wheeler and dealer, a real conniver. It's hilariously funny; it's a very funny

comedy. So, who knew, right? The student who played Pathelin, said, “Who knew that I had that conniving in me?”

Vanderscoff: Fabulous. Here, I’ll come over and I’ll—

Ellis: Yes, undo me. Unhitch me, unhand me, villain, from yon microphone! There we are.

Vanderscoff: Perfect.

Ellis: —whereas I can’t seem to find a copy of the CV, after all. You know, that huge tome that I was using as a kind of point of departure when you asked me some of your telling questions that were begging to have some kind of a rational answer.

Vanderscoff: Yes, well I have one printed out. Would you like to see it?

Ellis: Oh, you do have one printed out.

Vanderscoff: Yes, I have one here. It’s a bit annotated by me, but for reference—

Ellis: Well, I don’t know. If something comes up where you ask me something, maybe I’ll be able to use that as a guide.

The UCSC Colleges

When I first arrived as a graduate student, I was assigned to Merrill College, as I told you, where I had almost no one to rub shoulders and brain power with. It was very socially oriented, Merrill—extremely community, social. Not so much in the humanities. During that time, I was very anxious to become associated with Cowell. And then one day, a small committee came up to visit me and said, “How would you like to come down to Cowell?”

Because that's where all the language people essentially were located, people with whom I had something in common. So, I went down to Cowell. It must have been at least the last twenty to thirty years that I've been at Cowell. I'm terrible with dates, as you've found out, I'm sure. So somewhere I'm sure they know how long I've been at Cowell.

[*Looking over the CV*] Oh yeah, this is all the teaching stuff. So that was one college. The beauty, in the sense, a kind of hidden perk that came with language lecturers needing to have space on campus four days a week for the longest time—I think I told you, and then we went to three, finally, after many years—was that they used to just shuttle us around all over campus. So indeed, almost all of us got to teach at each of the colleges in one way or another. And so, you got to know that college and the people there and what it was all about and what the atmosphere and the environment was. And above all, you got to know—or I got to know—very happily and very readily, most of the staff that worked at the college, in the college office or in the library, whatever public rooms they had. And of course, we got to know what the space was like.

And it was a very good, for background learning. Instead of being isolated in just one college, teaching in just one college and getting to know the people just there and that was it—which could be delimiting—no, we got a taste of all over. Some of the buildings were much more difficult to access than others—for example, climbing that hill from Cowell to Merrill with a ton of books on your back was not an easy task. Our Chinese lecturer, who was just marvelous, used to call it “Cardiac Hill,” to go up that hill. [*laughs*] She was great, very brilliant.

And then when the new colleges opened, like College Seven and Eight, and getting to know your way around them became a little more difficult because they're connected—some of them have mazes to learn how to maneuver, especially because we only had a few minutes between classes in those days. I understand now, in fact, they've even cut the time between classes to fewer minutes. I think there used to be like fifteen minutes or so, to let you go from one location to the next, if you had a different locus for your class. So that could be difficult when it was raining and nasty, maneuvering—and of course, you definitely couldn't drive, because then you'll never find a parking spot if you give one up, especially not in that short time period.

So, I pretty well got to know my way around most of the campus. But in the later years, for example, I know John and I taught one of our FLIC [Foreign Language in Context] FLAC [Foreign Language Across the Curriculum] classes at College] Nine or Ten, one of those two brand new colleges. We did take the car to go from Cowell there. One fine day, we parked the car. Both of us were so engrossed in our chit chat, as usual, that when we came out of class, we had completely forgotten, both of us, where the car was. *[laughs]* We roamed around like in a scene from my latest cartoon, looking for the car and laughing. I can still remember the joy of that, both of us. How many PhDs does it take to find where you parked your car? *[laughter]* He was so witty and such a pleasure to be around. Anyway, that was a big joke.

Vanderscoff: So, you're working across the campus. But could you say a little more about your home environment at Cowell?

Ellis: Oh, when I came down to Cowell, it was so marvelous because the language people were in one hall, one little wing. So, I just had to go to the door and across the hall and knock

fiercely and there would be David or Hervé or Gildas or Patti—the Frenchies were all together in one little area. Now and then, they would intermingle; they would put a Chinese or a Russian or an Italian person to mingle in there with the French. It was great.

I told you, early on there was a great deal of collegiality in the language program. We shared so much. It was a means of marvelous support and therapy and morale-building, to be able to commiserate with each other and support each other that way, and encourage each other as much as we could, and help each other with ideas as much as we could.

La Maison francophone

Vanderscoff: When I think about language in Cowell, and particularly French language, one thing is *La Maison francophone*.⁶⁰

Ellis: *La Maison francophone*, yes, which was a marvelous institution, and the students got so much out of it.⁶¹ And those who were preparing to go on our quarter in Nîmes, or even to

⁶⁰ A building in Cowell that for some years was dedicated as a French language immersion residence.

⁶¹ During the editing of this oral history, Miriam Ellis wrote to Angela Elsey, founder of La Maison Francophone, to ask for more information about the program. Elsey provided the following information in an email of April 11, 2020:

La Maison Francophone is a residential academic program housed at Cowell College. It began in 1994 with the help of funding from an Instructional Improvement Grant and has continued with support from Cowell College, the Language Program, and the French Consulate. Over the years, Maison Director Angela Elsey has received two additional Instructional Improvement Grants to travel and gather materials on French-speaking, or Francophone, areas of the world to incorporate into the programs and coursework associated with the Maison Francophone. She also received a grant from the library to purchase films from Francophone Africa to enrich the collections.

The result is a thriving residential program, combining elements of learning communities, interdisciplinary study, and peer teaching, and giving students valuable exposure to diverse cultures.

All Maison residents are upper-class-students, and must have had the equivalent of at least one year of college level French prior to applying. All come to the Maison wishing for an “immersion” experience, to improve their French language skills and to learn about Francophone culture. Beyond that, there are few similarities among the students: they come from many disciplines—from Anthropology, to Biology, to Languages—and they have many motivations to learn French. Residents have achieved various levels of French language proficiency, allowing for interaction and teaching to take place between students at different

go for a year to study abroad, imagine the wonderful preparation they had for that because of the day-to-day living, vocabulary, and idioms which they mastered beforehand. That was really a great help, and just generally gave them so much more confidence in using the language as—again, I come back to that notion—as a tool, not as an end in itself, necessarily, although it could well be—but not in this case. If you were just going to devote your life to research—let’s say you were a Medievalist, then there wasn’t much in the vocabulary of day-

levels. An important element of the experience is the presence of native French speakers who live at the Maison and act as language assistants.

Director Elsey had several goals when she first envisioned the Maison:

- To give students opportunities for learning outside the classroom, by combining academics with residential life
- To allow students at different academic levels to interact
- To widen the focus of French language study beyond France, taking in the many cultures around the world where French is spoken: Quebec, Louisiana, Africa, Polynesia, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia, as well as European countries
- To provide exposure to Francophone culture beyond the walls of the Maison, both to other French language students and to UCSC students and members of the Santa Cruz community who are invited to attend events.
- The overriding language-learning goal she had for residents was “to get all students to advance from the point where they started.”

Activities at the Maison are varied. Each resident is required to enroll in a two-unit course on the Francophone world, also open to other students. The course, conducted in French, focuses on a different content area each quarter. This may be a region, culture, or historical period from the Francophone world. The course encompasses linguistics, history, sociology, art, politics, and frequently takes advantage of guest speakers from those disciplines, both from within and outside of the university community. In addition to the course, students participate in a variety of less formal activities. For instance, Director Elsey hosts a weekly “heure heureuse,” or happy hour, on Friday afternoons, where students and other French speakers may gather for refreshments and informal conversation in French. Students organize a special College Night each quarter at Cowell College focused on some aspect of Francophone culture. Recent College Nights have featured African dance, Tahitian music, and a Parisian cabaret.

All of this involves a substantial commitment and time investment on the part of Maison Director Elsey. She lives in her own apartment at the Maison, allowing students to drop in any time. Residents always speak French with her. Elsey has traveled to nearly all areas studied in the Francophone course, sometimes staying with a local family, gathering materials such as sound recordings, slides, and locally available publications, and gaining first-hand experience of the culture which she later incorporates into her teaching. Her most recent travels have been to Raiatea, in French Polynesia, and to Senegal. In addition, her duties include recruitment, administration of the program, and fund-raising.

Maintaining a residential academic program within a larger university does present challenges—from the expectable rough spots of twelve people living together in a confined space, to the recruitment difficulties presented by the relatively high cost of living on campus. Elsey notes that Cowell College has been very supportive of the Maison throughout its existence.

The payoff, for Elsey, is “seeing student interest and excitement, and their interactions in French together” outside of class. Former residents have taken with them a lasting interest in French and in Francophone cultures. Many Maison alumni have kept in touch, recounting subsequent experiences in the Peace Corps, or living abroad, and maintaining friendships across the globe.

to-day living that would exactly help you in that regard. But just for using the tool of communication for daily life, it was the *Maison* and then the quarter in Nîmes, which the Spanish eventually copied. I've forgotten the town now—in Mexico, where they did a quarter like we did, with doing two quarters in one, giving the students two levels in one quarter period. Oh, right, it was in Morelia, which is not the name of a town that everyone knows. That's where they had their program for a number of years.

And again, you'd have to check with someone like David, who's an historian in the language area of campus and knows all of those sorts of details about dates. I don't believe it was as long-lived a program as our Nîmes. Our Nîmes program lasted, I believe, at least through the eighties and maybe through the nineties. I don't really know when its demise came about. But unfortunately, always a question of funding. It's always *chercher l'argent*; to look for the money. So, it had its demise eventually, sad to say, because students got an enormous amount out of it.

It was wonderful for the faculty person who accompanied the students as well, as you can imagine. It was a great complementary experience to their pedagogic technique, and such a great means of enriching, not only their skills but also their general areas of competence, and of refurbishing certain elements of their teaching possibilities and adding new possibilities and new contacts that the students had made. Many of the students made such marvelous ties, links to the families with whom they stayed during that quarter and kept up relationships: writing, visiting, whatever, phoning, for years and years. And there was even a case where—it was very radical—where this woman there almost adopted one of the

students who stayed with her. They became that close. It was very, very touching, very sentimental—and can happen. You know, we talked about human relationships, after all.

Key Colleagues

Vanderscoff: So, speaking of relationships, then, one person whom you've mentioned in the Cowell context, in particular, that you wanted to talk about was Angie Christmann.

Ellis: Angie, Angie Christmann, yes—one of the people on my list, one of the outstanding stars and a person who has meant so much to me, has helped me in so many different ways over all the years that I've been on campus, and remains even a true supporter to this day. She'll come to the theater presentations; every year, she'll show up for a performance, dear Angie, even now she's retired. Just recently, in fact. She was a mainstay at Cowell for so many, many years, another behind-the-scenes heroine.

UCSC is a big corporation, and as with any big enterprise, there are people who are in the forefront, who are quite visible, who are quite up there right in the face of the public, who are the leaders, in open ways. And then there are those who are behind the scenes, who do so much, who never get the recognition, perhaps, or maybe the monetary rewards, or the kudos, or the acceptance, or the recognition or whatever, and get their fulfillment in so many other ways than a monetary sense, for their service. And that's Angie.

And now, I believe, she and another wonderful person who was on the staff for many years behind the scenes are putting together an archive for Cowell. I don't know how far they have gotten. I know I gave them some bits and pieces of material that Angie asked for. That is a wonderful project. And I believe Angie was honored not too long ago by some kind of

recognition, thanks to dear Faye, who did a ceremony to honor Angie for her service to Cowell. You should try and get to Angie, if you don't know her. She's such a charming person just to know as a human. She's wonderful.

As I told you, I think very early on in our series of discourses here, even when I was still at Merrill, Angie was the one who managed to arrange for me to do the original French theater performances at Cowell. She managed to find me space and allow us to use the premises and whatever they had going, which was so marvelous, because in those days, I had little or no budget. For the theater performances, she also enlisted the help of other Activities people at Cowell, to whom I'm enormously grateful to this day. And it was not a monetary kind of situation; it was because they thought it was worthwhile and it was contributing to the cultural enrichment of the college. So that was Angie. By all means, yes, I must mention Angie. For a top position on the Accolades list.

Okay, so I've mentioned some of the real stars on my Forever Grateful list, my French caucus colleagues, and others: David Orlando, Faye Crosby, Angie Christmann, John Dizikes—wonderful help all those times. Also, in decades past, there were, among staff folks, Sylvia Zito, Teresa Ronsse, Marianna Alves. Another crucial helper is Lisa Leslie in the language office, who was first a mainstay for the International Playhouse, and since its renaming, for MEIP. She still does advising for the students in language studies and also for those taking language as part of a larger plan of life. She's been on campus for many years, too, and deserves to be mentioned as a true pillar of the study of languages overall. She can always be relied on as a wonderful help in so many crucial, perhaps unrecognized, but certainly super-appreciated, vital ways.

I guess that's the story in life of those who get the kudos and the *réclame*, the acclaim, and those who quietly work behind the obvious activities to make things happen. Just as you being this pair of ears and this fount of wise and patient questioning—yes, you're behind the scenes there. I have to take my hat off. [*miming*] I'm taking off *mon chapeau* to Monsieur Cameron, to thank you for having sat through, what is it now, more than ten hours' worth of my blathering on and on?

And while we're on the subject of huge "Thank you's," I must express my infinite gratitude to Gildas Hamel, who has made it possible for me to pursue a project that is very dear to me, by his generous work in creating and being in charge of a website, where he has been posting my translations of operatic arias, including both the original and English texts. For SCOSI and the printed programs we made for the Young Artists series concerts, starting in the late seventies or early eighties, about which we spoke early on in our interviews—in the printed programs of those events, I used to provide the original texts and my translations of the arias being performed, so Gildas has made it possible for many of them to be available on line, to vocal students or anyone interested in understanding the textual meaning. So *mille fois merci, cher Gildas*, for your crucial help with this project.

Vanderscoff: Well, *merci*, Miriam. And I still have some more questions for you. [*laughs*]

Ellis: I know! And those questions that never seem to have an end, oh, good heavens!

Vanderscoff: Inexhaustible. [*laughs*]

Ellis: All right, all right. I'm waiting for the days when I'm going to be blackmailed for all of these bits of revelatory detail that I have shared with you. Ah-ha, that's your real job, isn't it?
[laughter]

Vanderscoff: *Kompromat?* Yeah.

Ellis: Da! So, you do know Russian! Never mind all of this so-called academic inquiry. Yes right, okay, go around getting the dirt on all of these so-called respectable humans. [laughter]

More on the International Playhouse

Vanderscoff: Well, let's see if we can add to the dossier here. So, you've talked a lot about this theme of recognition. I wanted to go back to one recognition that you have received. I wondered if you could tell the story of getting the *Chevalier des Palmes académiques*.

Ellis: Oh, the *Chevalier* bit. Oh yes. Well, as you know, I did that French theater program, mostly from 1972—except for the years when I was doing the productions in the spring, of the Opera Workshop. I think there were about six or seven years of those. I couldn't do both the French theater production and the opera production at the same time. It just got to be too much. I had to choose. And so, we went, in those days, for the opera productions.

But then I picked Les Trétaux up again and ended it with the great sea change in 2001 of having my colleagues, four of my colleagues in the other languages, who came to me together. And they said, "Listen, we want to get in the act," more or less—not quite in those words, but that's what it amounted to. "Enough of just doing French. Why can't we do, and let's do, Japanese, Chinese, German, Italian, and French."

So, in 2001, that's what we did, the very first International Playhouse, of which I have the program—which was an absolute shot in the dark. I went to the then-Cowell provost, Bill Ladusaw. He very kindly and open-mindedly said, "Okay, I'll give you some money to do this." I wasn't asking for much, and we didn't need much. Because we did simple theater—I told you at the beginning, real simple sets, basic bits of furniture, costumes, make-up, lights. And the ability to use the venue, because we used the Cowell dining hall; before it became just a dining hall they still had the ability to do some theater there, just basic stuff.

So that's what we did. There were two performances. We thought two would be sufficient. And then, bit by bit, we added two; we made it to four performances. People seemed to enjoy it, including the lecturers, who were giving their time. It was purely voluntary. They got no recompense whatever, except the doing. No financial recompense in those days whatever. Lately, I would say within the last decade or so, we have had the added wonderful impetus for them to get a little bit of research funding for participating, for directing a piece in the Playhouse. That has been received with a great deal of gratitude, as you can imagine.

And then, since about 2012, I believe it was, I had the enormous benefit, and I'm everlastingly grateful for the fact, of having Renée Cailloux come on board to be my associate producer. She's learning how to become a director of French, because she had had some theater experience, but as a dancer, not as fulfilling a leadership role in terms of putting a piece together. So, she's learning about directing and all of the production elements that go into putting an entire program together. Renée also graciously invited her talented husband, Philippe, who is a brilliant and skilled photographer, to performances, and for several seasons he has captured and created fascinating production shots, which we utilize for

publicity and archival purposes. We are deeply indebted to him for the superb sensitivity and acumen which they display. He is a “hard act to follow,” since Renée typically prefers giving students as many production tasks as possible, so they can develop their skills in the various endeavors that full productions demand. *Merci infiniment, Philippe, de votre intérêt et de votre oeuvre magnifique.*

We aim at a high degree of excellence. We try very, very hard to make the experience an enriching one for everyone concerned in it. We have students who do the translation of the text for the supertitles. And then, of course, they run the supertitles, one or more of the students. We have students who do videos of each production. Now that we have the wonderful Digital Arts major on campus, which can make a record of that kind of production, it’s really marvelous. Sometimes we can get majors in that field, and they can get a bit of extra credit, I believe, for doing the videoing. The videos end up on YouTube. I think I told you that one of the pieces from 2012 has had over 10,000 views, or had had last time I checked.

So, we’re hoping that we can keep the Playhouse visible, not only on this campus, but let other people know what Santa Cruz is doing with language in a new and innovative—and, as yet, I have not seen it duplicated elsewhere. One of our finest lecturers, in Japanese, Sakae Fujita, who was my co-producer for many years, since we began in 2001, in fact, she did a master’s thesis on that very subject, of theater as a pedagogic tool in language acquisition, as they call it, SLA, second-language acquisition. She did quite a lot of research to find out what there exists, worldwide, pretty much, in academia, to challenge our claim that we think we’re the only ones that do *this* kind of format. There have been essays into using theater, but that generally will be in one language. Let’s say somewhere a couple of professors will do a bit of

Italian theater, or a bit of German theater, or something, in whatever language they're familiar with. And then they'll write up an article about it, and that will be in the education journals and so forth. It's a big deal—it becomes a big deal. And a lot of them go into depth about the single experience.

Sakae did this kind of research to a great extent, for her master's thesis. She looked into the—of course, there are obvious benefits to students immediately, linguistically. You don't have to be too creative to figure that part out. But then there are other hidden psychological benefits for the students. I think I told you this a long time ago; they find out something of which they are capable, something that they had never suspected in their lives. Because I would say a good 90-something percent of our students who participate in the playhouse have never done theater before, in English or any other language—certainly not in a foreign language. Some of them, perhaps were in a little presentation in grammar school or in high school, but not to the extent here, where they have to memorize quite a long role and deliver it in a language that is not spontaneous to them. That's the rub, the Playhouse experience is much more demanding, and there is a very short period of time that we have to get it all together.

So, the students find out a lot about themselves. And isn't that the basic reason they're on campus? "Know thyself": is that not one of our guiding principles? Or "get to know thyself," or "get to stretch thyself to know thyself."

Vanderscoff: So, I'm really interested in the impact on *you*, because you've worked in theater in many different ways over the years. I'm curious what the impact on you has been, getting

exposed to works of theater and theater being conducted in languages that are outside of your own linguistic wheelhouse, Japanese theater and—

Ellis: Oh, it's absolutely miraculous. They talk about "the miracle of theater, and it's true: there really are miracles. The way we operate—and I'm sure there are better ways to do this program, but this is what we've been doing. And given the time and energy constraints of everyone involved, I really can't think of other ways by which we could— Maybe Renée will eventually come up with some new ideas. She's fine for new ideas, by the way, really excellent. She's very organized, very rational, very *terre à terre*, down to earth in her approach. She's such a marvelous person for me to work with, because very often I'm out there on Cosmos Number XQ59, and I need someone who's got both legs on *terra firma* to bring me back to the reality sandwiches. She's perfect for that. And I'm so grateful to have her vital contributions.

She's really good. Sometimes, she will just look at me, in her very French, school-mistress way and say to me, "Miriam!" You know, more or less, "Okay, that's it for now. Let's cool it for a minute." Not in that many words, but with that many looks, right, or body language. I am so appreciative, so grateful for that. I need someone like that really so badly to work with, to keep it real. Renée does that beautifully, very diplomatically and very rationally and coolly. She gets it done.

Vanderscoff: So, it's a growth experience for you, both in terms of the language repertoire and in terms of your collaborators.

Ellis: Oh yes, oh absolutely, absolutely. I remember the very first tentative essays of Renée, back in, I don't know, six or seven, whatever number of years ago since she's been involved. She would come up after or during a performance of the Playhouse and she would start talking to me, because she was still comparatively new on campus. She was not one of the cadre of the old guard of French. She came on board after Hervé and Gildas, David, and Patti, and I had retired. So that was since 2005 or so, '04 or '05, Renée came on board. She has also many skills with the computer which are extremely helpful. And she's very good at recruiting students to help, like stage managers, behind the scenes, and the videographers and other people. She has very excellent recruiting talents in many ways, to get students involved.

Of course, I'm not on campus anymore, theoretically; I'm not teaching anymore, so I don't have access to the students that she does, which is absolutely crucial. We need to keep getting students involved, yes, keep needing to recruit. So again, people for whom I am eternally grateful, for having them be part of my UCSC experience in so many different ways, and with so much reward to me personally. I hope that they feel that they're getting something for their hard labor—I really do. It really isn't remunerative—we don't think about money. Although now at least Renée can get a course relief for her work in the theater, which she absolutely, crucially, and without a scintilla of question, deserves, because she puts in so many hours and so much work and has so many marvelous suggestions and ways of helping the program continue.

Typically, what happens, this class is an independent study for which the student gets credit, depending upon the student's participation, the extent of that participation. If it's a leading role, obviously that takes many, many hours of work to master the lines and the

interpretation and the movement (“blocking” is the theater term.) And we meet as—I’ll give you French, as an example, because that’s the one I work with. We meet as a class. In other words, we have hours that we assign for meeting, a number of hours per week. That’s just for, I would say the first five to six weeks.

And then we eventually come into what we call tech week, technical week, where we, for the first time—up to now, it’s been each of the languages meeting at their times separately. No one has heard the whole program yet. So, the beginning of tech week, it used to be Mother’s Day. Now, we’ve put it to the day after Mother’s Day, so that students can spend time with their families. Of course, there was a big outcry, about that, so we changed the date. And so that is the beginning of tech week, the day after Mother’s Day, usually.

And that is the first time, if there are five languages or four languages, that is the first time we’re going to hear and see the first run-through of all the languages coming together. So, let’s say we have French, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese—and we had that last quarter, last year. So, we have four languages. So, what happens? We have to figure out time slots and the order of who’s going to go when and at what hours. We have the space reserved—let’s say we have it from four to seven or something like that, late afternoon, early evening— and so let’s say, “So first, let’s open with Chinese. We have Chinese, a run-through of Chinese. And then we’ll have maybe Spanish after Chinese. And then perhaps we’ll have Japanese, and then we’ll have French.” Let’s say we’re doing that order for the first run-through.

That’s getting all the students from each of the languages up there. Hopefully, they have dropped book. *Hopefully*—many times, they have not, so they’ll still have the text in hand. Their directors are not theater people; their directors are language people. So, there is all the

theatric movement to polish. There are the constraints of delivery, including not only interpretation, factually, of what they are saying, but of course interpretation [in] *how* they are going to say it. Which includes the two most difficult elements with beginning actors: A, for them to be heard, projection; B, for them to be seen, which means you do not turn your back to the audience. You do not “upstage yourself. “This is like teaching a seven or eight or nine-month-old how to walk or how to crawl or move. The most basic elements of theater, many of them have not yet mastered. They do not know that, because they’re not theater students. They’re language students.

So, there I am, yelling, “Projection! I can’t hear you!” We do a few exercises with them, trying to have them project their voices to fill that big space, because where we perform is that very big dining hall. Now it has of course, become the Stevenson Event Center, but it’s still a huge eating-up-of-sound kind of space. So, projection and profile, not to talk to the person with whom you are communicating—not to talk to that person the way you do in real life. This is really hard for amateur, beginning actors to accept, to internalize, and to do! They think the stage is real life, but it’s not. It’s make-believe. It’s another world. You don’t just slip from one world into another that easily.

They typically want to turn halfway, in profile, to talk to the person to whom they are supposed to be talking. And that, if you turn like this [*turns ninety degrees away from the interviewer*] to talk to that person, the audience loses all of this part of your face and of your speaking ability, and your ability to project.

Vanderscoff: If you go in profile, they can only see, yes—

Ellis: It gets lost in space. So, they have to learn about “cheating out,” which sounds so easy, such fun, and it’s so difficult to do, because it’s not innate in our society. In our culture, when we’re talking to someone, we’re supposed to make eye contact. We’re supposed to look at them. So, I always show the students—I take two people, so there are three of us there. And I say, “Here’s person A, and here’s person B.” [*indicating*] And I can say, “I do not have to turn to person A. I can make my body turn the slightest bit to person A. And I can be talking just right out here. I can look at person A as much as I want to while person A is talking to me. And of course, I make it so that person A doesn’t turn upstage to talk to person B but cheats out again.” See, you have to learn all of these little things, the other very basic elements of theater that they don’t know yet. I have to find a way— [*knocking comes from the front door*] I have written this all down.

Vanderscoff: Do you want me to get the door?

Ellis: Yeah. I wonder, knocking on the door? Let’s see who— [*recorder is turned off to answer the door; the record resumes shortly afterward*]

Let me tell you, from that rehearsal, which generally lasts three to four hours, I am an absolute wreck. And I’m absolutely sure it’s going to be a disaster, because it’s so raw. That first run-through is absolute hell, because there will be times when they don’t know their lines. There certainly are times when they’re not projecting anything. You can’t hear a single word. They certainly have not gotten the idea of building the character yet. I mean, sometimes there will be a couple of them who are along the way, a little bit further than others. But it’s so erratic. It’s so disjointed, in terms of quality, in terms of overall believability, let’s say, credibility. You know, it seems like there is a road in the Himalayas

somewhere that's blocked with snow, [*laughter*] and there's no way you're going to get down that road.

This is Monday, right. We have Monday night. We have Tuesday night. We have Wednesday night. Thursday is dress. So, we have three run-throughs before the dress. And then we open on Friday. This is what I still call, always will call, because in the real theater they called it "hell week." I still call it hell week. And most of those in the know have adopted and adapted that term, because it is absolute hell week.

So, from that first Monday until Thursday night, that's when the miracle happens. Dress rehearsal is usually okay—I shouldn't even say this, because who knows what's going to happen now? This year, it's going to be a disaster. Not that I'm superstitious, ha ha ha—

Vanderscoff: [*As Miriam mimes superstition*] Throwing salt over the shoulder, yes.

Ellis: Right. But anyway, by Wednesday night, we will have had technical rehearsals, by the way. Tuesday and Wednesday are tech rehearsals. And Thursday, the dress, of course, is very techy. That means with the titles, with the music, with any kind of effects that people need to make. Generally, we don't have big storms or big cannons going off or helicopters flying in. We don't quite do that, no, no. We kind of keep away from such effects.

So, by the time Friday night comes around and we're opening, hopefully it's going to be okay. And then hopefully, by Saturday night, it's a little bit better. And then closing night, Sunday night, hopefully it will be almost, as I like to tell my students in French, "*Presque pas mal*," which means "almost not bad." That's my highest form of praise, *presque pas mal*. [*laughs*]

So that's the MO of the playhouse. It can sound daunting and challenging and crazy, all of which it is. And yet those students, they realize with me that I'm screaming at them. I'm carrying on. I'm insulting them. You know, I know a few words of Spanish, and I know a very few words of Russian, because very good, which I never say. [laughs] *Ochen'*—*ochen'* is very—"o*chen' khorosho* is very good." I've lost it after all these years. But still, I can say things like *khorosho*, which means good. I can say *plokho*, which means poor; lousy—that one I remember. [laughs]

Vanderscoff: How do the students respond to you, in particular?

Ellis: Yes, how do they respond to me? It's a very good question. "Really? Who is this dotty old lady coming in at the last minute? We've never seen her. Who is she to be telling us what we're supposed to do?"

The other thing is, when I was learning theater in the French theater—in American theater, the practice is, especially with amateur actors, to quote, "give notes." And they do this in the professional theater, too, to some extent. But some directors do not. Some directors do just what I do, and that is they jump in at the *instant* that something needs to be fixed, and they fix it at that instant. They do not write down a note to give to an actor, who will look at the note an hour or two later and it will mean absolutely nothing, because he or she will completely have forgotten, "What was the circumstance? What did I do wrong? What should I do to do right?"

So, in other words [snaps], you change it then and there, or it's going to go right off into the ether and be forgotten. So that's my technique. And it's not the technique of, certainly not of

my amateur language people, directors. A lot of them don't understand this business about correcting mistakes on the spot, so that they mean something to the student.

Yes, and some of them give the direction, of their piece because they feel so unprepared for it, over to students from our theater arts department. They are in the will-give-notes department. Because that's the way American theater works: they give notes. It's fine. You can give notes to, oh, I don't know, Jane Fonda, maybe, or to, I don't know, name me one of those big ones up there—Paul Newman, you can give notes, sure. [*laughs*]

Vanderscoff: So, after hell week, how do you feel when you're sitting there, watching the live performances?

Ellis: Opening night is always such a dice throw, because something can always go wrong. Almost always, it does; almost always *something* has to go wrong, either in one of the languages they forget this or that or the other. I mean, we have had our moments where, I won't mention what language it was, but the actors completely forgot their lines. And they turned around and looked up at the supertitles to see what the English was, which then brought back whatever the language was that they had forgotten. We've had wonderful, horrible moments.

One year—I won't mention which language it was—they had all prepared their piece to be like a little college fun and games thing, or something that you did at camp—you know, that kind of level. It's not the level that we try to reach. We really try for a certain degree of excellence, because theater is sacrosanct to me, really, *really*, from all the years that I worked in it. It's not just a pastime. It's not just a little divergence from everyday life or whatever. It's

a place of worship, much as for the ancient Greeks with their arenas. In other words, there's something very respected and respectable and to be respected, very much for me, theater—for me, personally. Unfortunately, it's not a general feeling among all the participants. But this is the way I feel about it.

It's aiming at taking a mass of people who are not familiar with this text and with these events and with these characters and with these emotions and with these tragedies and with these comedies of life—taking people along on this journey and making them see in a different way and to feel in a different way, perhaps, than they were doing when they walked into the space. In other words, opening their minds and their imaginations and their sensibilities and their wonder, their awe, their respect for life and for what it can give us. And for some of them, perhaps a discovery of unknown beauties that exist in life, of which you've never partaken, because you didn't know that they existed. And perhaps looking at a problem that is so universal that it doesn't matter what language you're hearing. You understand the problem perfectly, because it's an all-encompassing, universal, human problem. I always try and throw that kind of clichéd line in, in my opening welcome to the audience, of how the playhouse always illustrates for us, no matter what pieces we're doing—and the pieces almost never, have any overt relationship to each other—because each director picks out something that is possible to do, in the sense that the students with whom the director is working will be able to grasp, not only the lexical, literal meaning of the text, but will be able to interpret and make it live, bring it to life, bring the character to life.

See, everybody's kind of flailing a little bit in the dark here. We're all these blind people in a cave. Sometimes the director's flailing just as much as the students, because the director has

not had the experience of—it's a transformational experience, taking the raw material of a young person who's had a limited life experience, and probably has limited time, maybe is working two jobs besides going to school, in order to be able to pay to go to school. And they have a social life, after all, and we can't deny them that; they need that very much, too. And maybe they have some family obligations. Who knows? You never know what's going on with students these days. So, asking them to do, in a very short period of time, a great shedding of their normal skin and growing another one, becoming another human, reacting and co-acting and acting in a different, perhaps in a different era completely—certainly in a different place—and in a different mode of expression that's still very uncomfortable and alien and just right there, a bit beyond reach, that we have to really stretch to get to, it's really asking a lot of these poor students.

I actually get some masochists who come back a second, sometimes even a third time to be part of the Playhouse. Because one does have those kind in the world, you know, who love to suffer. *[laughs]* Oh, pass me the whip again, Charlie! The self-flagellators.

Vanderscoff: Where do you think—

Ellis: No, actually, I do get students who come—I had some of my best performances from such returning students. This was the third time they came back to do French theater. And I always called them “masochists” anyway, to their faces. And they laughed their heads off. But it's true, because they really do gain something out of it, despite the effort, or perhaps because of it.

At one time, I was writing a long article for some professor somewhere, I don't know, who was somewhat interested in the idea of language pedagogy being helped through theatrical experience. So, I wrote and I asked some of our "alumni" students, just generally asked them, those who had been with us in earlier years, a couple of earlier years, if they would write a few words about their experience. It didn't have to be all so congratulatory or positive; you know, the good and the bad stuff.

And I remember Ben; Ben, one of the students, I still remember him. I think I'm on Facebook with him, or LinkedIn, or one of those. Yes, we keep in touch a little bit. He was very good. The first year he showed up, we were doing Molière. I was doing a very, very difficult scene. From one of Molière's great comedies, *les grandes comédies*, his great comedies, which was extremely biographical, autobiographical. He was describing his own life in this wonderful comedy about a man who had such high standards for the purity of an unmarried woman—at the libidinous, lecherous court of Louis XIV, right, where it was like the notches in the belt, how many mistresses you had. Not for the women; for the men, of course, the double standard.

Anyway, so which one was this? This was '*École des femmes*,' *School for Wives* or "*School for Women*" (Same word, "*femme*" for both functions in *lide*. And so, I gave Ben this role, the role of Arnolphe, which was really Molière describing his own life. Because Molière had fallen in love with this young, coquettish woman. And he was very worried that she would not be faithful to him, because she was a coquette, which women were supposed to be—the young, pretty ones. So, this is a marvelous comedy about an old guy who has this ward, and she was the child of a peasant family. And he took her away at the tender age, I don't know, eight or

ten or whatever, took her from the family and put her with some of his servants, whom he oversaw very closely, to raise her in such a strict fashion that she would remain completely pure and innocent. And he named her Agnès, Agnès,⁶² like Agnus Dei, you know that? Lamb, Lamb of God. So, he names her, very ironically, Agnès.

Now she's about sixteen or seventeen, time for her to be married. And here's this Arnolphe, who's an old guy now. And he has this pure creation that he has made. He's seen to it that she'd be completely innocent and pure by keeping her well away from any kind of possibility of seduction or wrongdoing, by keeping her away from the court or anything to do with those kinds of circles. Now, she's in his home with her separate quarters and is almost a prisoner, completely constrained.

He goes away for a few days. And while he's away, what happens? Agnès is out on the balcony, sewing, when this handsome young fellow passes by. They look at each other and connect, and nature takes its course. He is mad about her, of course, and she is equally smitten with newfound emotions. and very attracted to this handsome young man. She had never seen such a creature, [*laughs*] and she doesn't know what's going on with her feelings.

Arnolphe comes back from his brief trip. And of course, he immediately begins to suspect—he's always suspicious of her, no matter what she does. So, he has this wonderful dialogue with her where he wants to know what she did in the three days that he was gone. And she says, "Oh," and she takes out all these things that she sewed up, two shirts for him, and new

⁶² Miriam delivers this first with French pronunciation, then English.

things to wear at night—because when you slept, you always had to have nightcaps—and she made herself some coifs.

So, she takes out all the things. “What did you do during the time I was gone?” So, she shows them to him. And eventually, she’s so innocent and pure that she tells him about how she looked out—she was on the balcony, and this young man started to say these beautiful things to her about how she just made him so sick with her eyes, just by looking at him, her eyes inflamed him or infected him with this illness. Very flowery language, yes, the malady of love. Of course, she doesn’t understand any of that. Oh yes, and then she keeps telling everything that happened during that short encounter with this lovely young man. And she has one line, “*il m’a pris,*” he took my—“And she keeps trying to tell Arnolphe that, oh, he took her handkerchief. And until she gets that whole line out, oh, Arnolphe almost has a heart attack. It’s wonderful double entendre, very witty.

Vanderscoff: And so, you put this on.

Ellis: So, for him, this was his first time in the Playhouse. And later on, he wrote this, when I asked him to write a little bit about his experience. He said, “What happened to me? I walk in there, and I get this part. Not only is it in seventeenth-century French, but it’s in rhymed couplets. Not only is it in rhymed couplets, but I have to learn all about French poetry, which has twelve syllables in each line. And you have to count every damn syllable.” It’s true. He used to be up there, “*Alors, je ne peux pas.*” And you have to stop after the sixth syllable, which is called the *hémistiche*, half of the twelve, six is half of twelve. So, there’s a little pause after the sixth. And then you give the other six: “*Allons, Flipote, allons, que je me découvre.*” Six and

six. It's a rhythm there. There's an absolute cadence to the twelve syllables. That was his first encounter with the French theater.

He said, "I never thought—" And then he had a passage to interpret that was a monologue which was about that long. [*indicates distance*] It was really, really tough, ran through all the emotions—it was marvelous but very tough. And here he is, and I had confidence that he could do the role, one of the big roles in classic French theater, Arnolphe. He did a good job with it. Ben is the one who came back for three seasons. know the third time he did a piece from *Fanny*, which is twentieth century. He did better, actually, with Arnolphe than with either of the other two pieces—and that was the hardest of the three roles to master. He really stretched to learn those lines. His third role was the Fire Chief in "The Bald Soprano" ("*La cantatrice chauve*," which is also very demanding and quite amusing, but is, at least, in prose! Ben developed a strong sense of comic timing and honed his theatrical skills steadily from the Molière to the Ionesco and Pagnol roles. He was a strong asset to each of the programs and it was a great pleasure to work with him.

So that's what happens. But not everyone grows like that; not everyone has the talent. He has a good ear for theater, and he has a good comedic sense.

And then we had another young man, with whom Ben worked on a scene from *Fanny* by Pagnol, for his third role. And when this second student, Zachary Scovel, graduated, he joined a theater company in Sacramento, I think, it was, where they were doing rep. They were doing one piece after another, learning all kinds of different texts, and he stayed with them for a couple of years. I still think that he's a real theater person, who could make himself a

substantial career, given the difficulties of such an endeavor. Unfortunately, I don't know what happened with those plans.

Vanderscoff: We can fill it in.

Ellis: It's going to bother me now, because he was so really talented for theater. I could tell, because he was the one who was always there earlier than anybody else, and he always stayed later than anybody else. [*laughs*] He just couldn't get enough of it. He took to whatever role he had, like the cliché duck.

Vanderscoff: So, you had these connections with students. One piece of the Playhouse has to do with a student of yours from the early nineties. I wanted to circle back to the endowment that you were talking about, and I was wondering if you could say a little bit about Marieke Rothschild and the story of the endowment.

Ellis: Well, Marieke was my student in—did we figure it out, was it the late eighties or something like that?

Vanderscoff: I think early nineties, maybe.

Ellis: Or maybe early nineties, yes. I did a translation thesis with her and worked very, very closely with her one-on-one. Because when you're working on a thesis like that, it is a one-on-one kind of thing. And she did it very well. It was a particularly difficult piece, because it was in a very twentieth-century, modern style, with a lot left to the imagination. Not a great deal of detailed narrative—a lot you had to fill in by yourself. You had to really participate in creating the text in some ways.

Le Regard de la femme, was the name of the novel: *The Woman's Glance* or *The Woman's Vision* or *The Woman's Perspective*, if you want to go a little further than that. *Regard*, *regarde*, *regarder*, regard this, which means "look at this," right. *Regarde-moi*, look at me. And it's interesting that in English, I hold him in high "regard"—you know, "esteem," it's come to mean that. In other words, it has a judgmental element to it, too, the idea of looking and seeing and also evaluating and judging and/or understanding what you see. Because we are very visual, aren't we? How well I know, since I have only one eye that's working well. So, I know only too well that it's a visual world.

Then, *Le Regard de la femme* was the name of her thesis, the name of the book of which she translated a long chapter for the thesis. And yes, it's one of those books where you say, "What the hell is that all about?" Which you do quite a lot with modern literature, by the way, or one does. I took Marieke under my wing because she was a bit older; I think she had her two children then. And she was a re-entry woman coming back to school, and since I had been there and done that, I so admired the younger generation for following that path. I so wanted to help, as much as I could. She didn't know anyone when she came on campus; she was quite lonely from that standpoint. And having done a language studies major, she had to do the exit requirement. I told you that we had set up some pretty stringent choices and Marieke opted to work on a translation project.

She did quite well. She had a good language sense, because she was of Dutch, if you'll pardon the expression, heritage. You could tell from the name, Marieke, right—Marieke, which almost no Anglophone that I've heard try it, ever can pronounce correctly. Why is that so hard for English speakers? They call her Mary-a, Mary-eeek—it drives me crazy. And I keep

saying, Ma-rie-ke. That's it. It's like a diminutive of Marie, isn't it? It's like saying "Marie dear" or something slightly affectionate. Marie, with a "ke," adding those little extra sound bites at the end makes it more diminutive and more precious, in a sense, giving a feeling of endearment or a warm evaluation of the person (which, in this case, is very well deserved.)

Vanderscoff: So, she's your student in those years, and then there's this reconnection that happens around the Playhouse.

Ellis: So, she was a student then. And she graduated and they did well. Her husband did very well in his career. She and her husband, Jeff, are very personable and generous, very philanthropically involved in their various areas of interest.

Ellis: Jeff is her husband.

But the way that we reconnected happened was due to the enormous interest and help of, once again, Provost Faye Crosby, who interceded with Jeff Shilling, who was then the Associate Vice-Chancellor for Philanthropy, I don't remember if Marieke was a Cowellie. She very probably could have been, because, who else was taking language studies? A lot of those majors were Cowellies. And I definitely remember Marieke coming to my overcrowded, packed-with-all-the-stuff-I-never-thought-to-throw-out office in Cowell, for our meetings about her thesis. She would come perhaps a couple of times a week. And we'd work, mostly during my office hours—it was a word-by-word kind of enterprise, time-consuming, but rewarding.

Furthermore, to work with me, you have to be pretty flexible and quite, what should I say, unconstrained, in the ego department. If you're going to be hurt by every one of my criticisms

when it comes, especially when it comes to nuances of translation—another thing that’s very, very sacrosanct to me, is translation, because I think of it as an ethical undertaking, just as I think of theater interpretation, because it’s another form of translation, as being an ethical enterprise with the caveat of not to betray. Remember I told you about Ionesco’s unhappy experience with this fellow who had gotten money to do a film, or whatever, of one of his works?

Vanderscoff: Yes, Ionesco didn’t like it.

Ellis: I think it was *Ce formidable bordel!* I think that was the piece. And he was so upset about it that I had to do that—well, once in a lifetime, I was a diplomat. I wasn’t a good diplomat. I was a lousy diplomat, because I hurt the poor theater arts prof so badly. I don’t know how I could have not hurt him by telling him, “You were all wrong. And he hates it.” [*laughs*] What was I supposed to say? I was in such a position. And it was not even in my pay grade. [*laughs*] Yes, right, to be a UN diplomat, walking on such thin ice, I don’t know how I could have coated the truth in that situation.

Vanderscoff: So, I’m curious about your feelings as to the endowment, and then the future of the Playhouse, now that it has this financial footing—

Ellis: Well, my feelings about it are that I am— By the way, there’s Marieke up there. [*indicating her shelves of photographs*] Did you see that picture? Look at that. I’ve actually got a picture of her, right next to the clown. The clown is from my dear friend in France; he sent me that a long time ago, the [*paillasse*]. I once did a play about a clown. They’re called des [*paillasses*]. And you know what that is? A mat that, like there [*pointing to the doorway*], a

mat that you wipe your feet on. That's a [*paillasse*]. And that's one of their terms for a clown, to show you the low esteem, right, in the society.

Vanderscoff: So, you were saying about—

Ellis: I was saying about the endowment, that it's a marvelous, comforting thought that there's money to keep it going, because there is always a certain amount of financial outlay. Now, the provosts of Stevenson and Cowell have traditionally helped us financially—especially the provost of Stevenson, who has habitually given money to pay for the rental of the space— We have to rent the space, the center where we do the shows, even though we don't charge. We've always had no admission charge because we consider it a service to UCSC, the theater, and to the community. So, we have free admission.

And many times, we were really, really strapped for any funds at all. Because we do need a little bit of money every year. There are the expenses of the crew. We have to pay the technical crew. These are all students who are doing work-study. We typically have to pay to some degree for costumes, sets, props, some of the accoutrements, even though they're very simple and simplified and nothing very expensive, usually. But each director gets a very small budget to work with. They're supposed to stay within that small budget.

And then, as I think I told you, for a very few years now, maybe a decade or less, the directors have been granted a small stipend of research funds for their participation in the Playhouse which is very nice. For example, if they need to, I don't know, improve their computer with a piece of equipment, or—I don't even know what it entails. Renée pretty much handles the money part of it. It's not something I like to do, or know how to do, or am interested in doing,

although I do like to see a budget, to see what was spent each year, just so we know we're keeping within our means.

The endowment exists and it's a body of funds that cannot be touched. All that we can utilize from the endowment is a portion of the interest that it accrues every year. And that's what we do. I'm sure that we don't even use the entire amount of interest because all of the directors have gotten the message to, "Keep it as simple as possible." We just use whatever set pieces there are or that Cowell can take out of its—Cowell has someplace, a warehouse or a storage place, where they have certain pieces that we can use, if they're appropriate.

There's a very helpful fellow with whom I had the pleasure of working for the first time last year. He runs the Rainbow Theater. Dale Johnson is his name and he was so helpful. He's a real theater person, and was so efficient in finding everything we needed for last season's production. Thank you, Dale, and I hope we can work together again.

Then it's a matter of the directors having to scrounge around; they borrow this prop from this one, or they manage to get something they need from someone else, and so forth. Now, when we do Japanese in the traditional, from the Kyōgen school from the fourteenth century, it's more complicated. Sakae had a wonderful friend who had been in theater for a long time. She was a costume designer for traditional raiment.⁶³ Some time, it would be, if you had nothing else to do, it would be maybe interesting to you to look up on YouTube some of the Japanese pieces that we have done in costume. *Sweet Poison* is one that comes to mind; that's one of Sakae's best pieces. And just imagine how she worked with those students from the

⁶³ Kyogen is a form of classical Japanese comic theater. It was traditionally performed between acts of more serious and dramatic Noh theater.

beginning of the winter quarter; I'm talking about Sakae Fujita, pillar number one of the establishment of the Playhouse, who was with us from 2001 all the way up to most recently, when her health did not allow her to take as active a part. She is at the head of the "Accolades List" for the whole Playhouse venture of the past twenty years. With infinite pleasure, now I have Renée, who has stepped in to do many of the things that Sakae did for all those years, except, of course, not to direct the Japanese, especially the Kyōgen theater.

Anyone who would be knowledgeable about Japanese culture of that time period is absolutely thunderstruck when they find out that we have this expert in Kyōgen, in that kind of theater; that we have an expert like that who's able to get the students to do it. Because it's all very stylized movement, very slow, and these robes that they wear, and the way that they move, and the way that they relate to each other, to other actors—a lot of the lines are completely thrown away upstage. And they're enchanted; they're intoned. Sakae would take her students, who are in their second—sometimes third, if she had them—year, beginning in January, and start training them in means of projection, movement, gesture, pace, rhythm, all of the things that go into doing a very stylized presentation.

So, it's not just "Sunday night in the dorm" or something of that level. As I told you before, really Cameron, we strive for as high a degree of excellence as time constraints, students' abilities, and motivation and strength and everything else, allow. We strive to achieve something that is worthy of the word "theater." I hate to say this, but in Santa Cruz, I was pretty abashed when I first came to town, to find, going to all kinds of productions and performances, to find that the level of acceptance for standing ovations by the public in this town is a very low bar, I'm sorry to say. It's spoken like a real snob—I know, that's me. I

highly admit to being a real snob when it comes to artistic endeavors. To go crazy over something that's extraordinarily mediocre is just, to me, most hypocritical and unworthy. Of course, I suppose if you want to give an A for effort to a student production, or whatever it is, I don't know—but it's a very "walking-on-eggshells" thing for me.

So, we do strive to make it more than "The Hijinks of Dorm Six." I mean, you could do that. I remember that over the years, my son, Jonathan—because in May, he's almost never on this continent, just about—well, he came to one or two productions of the Playhouse. He said of one piece that was done that year, he said, "Oh, well, this is more like a college production." We had a visiting director, someone who had never directed before. She was doing something in Japanese, and it was a very "Joe College kind-of-level" thing. Jonathan said, "Yeah, these are foreign students. And they're talking—" And that was the gist of it, the actors were talking about their impression of American society, which is fine. It's a lovely intercultural kind of presentation to give, to let Americans see what they look like, from a different perspective, a different culture. That was fine. So, Jonathan had that comment about it, that that was the college level that he was more or less expecting.

But I try and aim a little higher than that, especially with the French. And getting back to the discussion where we started, about putting the whole complex thing together, right, and how it comes out in the end; well, in the end, no matter what I try to do, no matter what the directors try to do, no matter what the students try to do, we don't always reach such a high level of excellence overall. We usually come off acceptably well; okay; if they didn't forget their lines—I'm always happy for small miracles. They didn't turn around to look up at the titles, to find out where they were. [*laughs*] That's always a real blessing, isn't it? Be happy

for small favors, thankful. And everyone showed up when they were supposed to be on stage—that's truly a nice thing, as well—in all the languages.

Now, we have had some directors who were with us the very first—I think I told you, the very first time we had the Chinese, Japanese, the Italian, the German, and the French. We had those five at first. Then we added Spanish, I think the second year, and we started to add Russian a few years after that. And then, bit by bit, we've had people retire and we've had new people come in and try and take their place. But I am always looking for students to take part, and for directors, for faculty, for language people to take part. And that's where Renée is priceless to do the recruiting because she is still working and still has comradeship and collegueship with the Language people, whereas I don't. Which is very sad for me, because I don't know them on a regular basis. Just maybe see them once a year, if they're interested in participating.

It's very much a labor of love still, as it always was. But many lecturers come from far away because they can't afford to live in Santa Cruz, so they have that long commute. And they have families. And they have responsibilities.

Vanderscoff: Well, it's a remarkable expression of different threads of your own interests, from the theater to the language program, and a testament to the involvement of lecturers on the campus, it seems to me—to connect a lot of things that you've brought up over these different sessions.

Ellis: Well, it's getting harder and harder to attract good people. First of all, there is that three or four times a week commute with all the traffic that we have and all the time that it takes

to get here from outlying regions. Well, we'll see what happens for the twentieth birthday. I was hoping we could do something a little bit different this year, in the sense of maybe having a little celebration of some sort. I don't know, that would be nice. I would love to bring back some of the former participants. Of course, so many of them are now parents with their families and their responsibilities and so on. And so many of them are gone, back in Europe or live all over the country. But maybe if a few of them sent a few words, just a little statement about, "Oh, I was in the playhouse in 20-whatever"— And since then, I've hated theater!"

[laughter] Who knows what they might write?

Vanderscoff: So just keeping an eye on time, and perhaps winding down soon here—we've gone about an hour and a half.

Ellis: Is it time? I think it is. Ten after two? Is that right?

Vanderscoff: Yeah, that would be about right. So just a question on my end is, you have—

Ellis: Are we through with the questions? Let's hear if you have more questions about the Playhouse, or about anything.

Vanderscoff: Yeah. Maybe just one or two big picture ones, just to tie it off. One is that you've seen UCSC go through a lot of changes over the years since you first came here in '71. I wonder just what you've thought about those changes and where you see, for better and for worse, over the big picture—

Ellis: Well, for me, for worse has been the physical multiplication like rabbits from when I came. I had this image for a long, long time and this vision—which became, I suppose,

imprinted on my meager brain—and that was of the small number of bodies, the kind of knowable mass cohort, if you will, of bodies on campus with whom to contend. Then over the years, it became more and more such a challenge as it grew and multiplied and multiplied and multiplied from that little initial 4000, where people knew each other—and I mean, people *really* got to know each other well during their time here because of the small numbers and of the, as I told you way back, of the openness and the interest.

Jon, my son, was here in '71 when I got here. Last night I asked him, “How did you go from College Five”—which was the arts college—“to become a fully fledged science major?” I said, “Here you were always interested in writing and poetry, things like that. And next thing, I turn around, and you’re diving to the bottom of the ocean in the *Nautilus*,” which he did, by the way. Went down in that two-man submarine to the bottom. He also did diving, way deep, deep, without anybody to look out for sharks. I never thought of that one, of course, or tried hard not to. [*makes face*]

I said, “How did you get there? What happened?” He said, “Well, when I came”—this is the openness I was telling you about many times—“this professor, John Pearse”—who was one of the big founders in science, and especially marine science—“put out a call for anyone who was interested in learning more about the ocean.” Of course, my children were always interested, because we always lived near the ocean, so my husband and I would take them to the tide pools to rummage around and look at what grew and what lived there and find all these marvelous critters, even when they were really small and I was worried about them slipping on the rocks. But they managed. We started studying that part of marine ecology

really early. I guess it was ingrained in them, because they all love the beach. They're all good swimmers, too.

So, I said, "What happened?" So, Jonathan said, "Well, I just decided to show up. And I said, 'I would like to learn more about what lives in the ocean,'" that kind of thing. So, John Pearse organized them into little groups of twos, and Jonathan met some of his best pals right then and there, whom he's known since then. And one of them, Alan Shanks, was one with whom he started to go team diving. They went down deeper and deeper and deeper. Alan and he devised some kind of camera to take pictures of these crazy things that inhabit the depths, places where people never had recorded. And this is the early seventies. Jonathan did a photo exhibit during those years which was taken up by the Smithsonian, and it toured around the whole country. He called them UFOs, "unknown fauna of the open seas," to show how we don't know what's there. That's even before he had anything to do with NASA, where he eventually ended up. But that's what he named it, this exhibit, "UFOs." And he went to school with Julie Packard, one of the ones who founded the aquarium—her family founded the aquarium.⁶⁴ And they had Jon's exhibit I think somewhere; I think they still have it in their holdings. And I told you that he made a large quantity of postcards, with photos from that exhibit. *[laughs]* We still have some of those truly unique postcards as a reminder of his diving days.

So that was then. That was the spirit of openness. Would that happen today in the hard sciences? Would people go all the way there, to recruit students from Porter, the long-haired,

⁶⁴ Julie Packard is a central figure in the founding and growth of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, along with other members of her family.

guitar-pluckin', [*sniffs*] sniffing and smoking whatever it was they were sniffing and smoking, "artistic" types? Would they do that to get a group to go and jump into the ocean, to find out what's going on there? It's just amazing, in retrospect.

So, from marine sciences, then Jon went into nanotechnology. That was another one of his areas. And he's done all kinds of other research—and specialization.

Reflections on UC Santa Cruz

Vanderscoff: So, there's a breadth and an openness that existed in those days. What do you see now when you go up there and work with students? What's stayed the same? What's changed?

Ellis: I'll tell you something marvelous, and that is, in our very last French cast, I had for the first time, an astrophysics major playing a role. If you look in the back of our more recent programs—[*searching papers*] do I have any programs? Oh, these are SCOSI programs, wrong program. In the back of our Playhouse programs, I decided to initiate this listing a few years ago, to show, who are these students doing theater in these various languages? And at the back of the program—we listed all the participants' majors. I don't think I have any programs here. Let me just go and grab one.

Vanderscoff: Here, I can unclip you.

Ellis: Oh, I'm tethered! Gotta keep these wild beasts tethered. [*Miriam, unclipped from the lapel mic, walks out of the room*] I'll just go grab one from 2019, because I do want you to see my astrophysicist.

Vanderscoff: Sure. [*recorder is turned off; recording resumes when Miriam re-enters*]

Ellis: Another interesting detail: I had a female engineer for the first time, too, in the cast last year, for which I was delighted. She was great, except that she had the audacity to graduate—I think. That’s the worst of it, you know, when students work on a production and they get some training, and then they go and graduate. Well, what can you do about that? I guess that’s what they’re here for, after all.

Oh, I’m sorry, I cannot find a program from this year.

Vanderscoff: Oh no, that’s fine, that’s fine. [*looking at a program from another year*]

Ellis: Well, you get the idea.

Vanderscoff: Yes, I do. I can see just from—

Ellis: The list of what the students—

Vanderscoff: —there are people from all across the divisions.

Ellis: And who are these adventurers that come, and they’re not ashamed of showing so much of themselves? Because that’s what theater is: it’s a very revelatory enterprise, is it not? It’s standing up and putting yourself out there and saying, “Look at me. I have the nerve to think I can impart something to you.” It does take a certain amount of, oh, whatever, courage, perhaps.

Vanderscoff: So, are you sensing in the Playhouse that it’s a space for some of that older UCSC spirit, where people are coming together across some of these differences?

Ellis: But Cameron, that is exactly why I do it. You just happened to put your finger right on it. That is *exactly* why I do it. Because to me, that's still somewhere lagging in the back of these dusty corridors here [*indicating head*], that *this* is what it used to be like on this campus. This is what it used to be like, where we were a company of friends, and still, today, we're a company of people who are searching together to do something that is worth doing, to share aspects of life, of history, of culture, of character. And as I always say, my cliché, no matter how diverse the cultures, no matter how different the personalities, we always come to the same conclusion: we have so much in common. It's called being human. And that's where we always end. And that's the beauty of the whole thing, because it's true.

Especially when I think that we had—for years and years, we had this fellow with whom it was so great to work. He was very bright, very bright. Bill Nickell was his name; he was a lecturer in Russian, William Nickell. A very, very bright man. And sadly for us, but happily for him, he got up one day and had a wonderful offer from the University of Chicago. So, he went to Chicago. So that's where he is now. I miss Bill, because he would put on Russian pieces, [*laughs*] and it never, ever failed: Tom Lehrer—who came to all the shows, I told you—would come to me and shake his head quizzically back and forth and say, “What was that Russian all about?” I would shake my head and say, “Well, I'm not really sure.” [*laughs*] Not that that surprised me!

Because well, if you study Russian, I started to tell you about it, how it is at the same time so primitive, the language itself—“*Ja student, vy professor,*” all right? No verb “to be,” okay? And then you have to learn—count them, folks—manifestations of a noun or an adjective with a root that stays the same, but it has an ending that changes. Whether you want to say, “I am

going home,” “*Ja idu domoy*”; so *dom* is home, and *-oy*, at the end, becomes the suffix, which tells you that it is the object of the verb, the indirect object. So, you have to memorize nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, prepositional, or locative—six cases. I think Latin has six. Am I wrong? Too many years ago that I memorized all of that.

So that the *dom*—from *domoy*, from home—yes, *dom* doesn’t change, but all those endings are going to change. So, it depends on the function that the word is fulfilling in that particular structure of what you want to say. If it’s the subject, the nominative case is going to be *dom* with a different ending, the root plus a different ending. If it’s an indirect object; if it’s being used as a preposition; and on and on for all of these different cases. So, you have to memorize many forms. That’s what I mean about complicated. Certain structures are taken for granted, and they’re implied in the sense of what you’re saying, so you don’t have to actually say them. That gets a little more nuanced, as the example of the lack of “to be” when identifying what you do as a career.

My husband, Paul, was a great book collector. And he had one—I think I still have it somewhere—called *The Russian Mind*, where someone spent a whole book trying to figure out what makes Russians Russians. So even there, right there is something intriguing; I wonder if someone would write *The American Mind*, where that would lead. Because a language reflects so much about the people who speak it, does it not, after all?

So, to finish, to wind everything up where we started, I wanted to give you the example of Jonathan, just because he is still a seeker. Did I tell you the and his wife, Susanne, just came back from China? But they’re leaving for Iceland in about two weeks, for a month. And hopefully, he can set up some of his current project there. That would be great, because it’s

a very forward-looking culture. And they have a very high degree, by the way, of education in that country. And, they are right on the front lines of the suffering, the absolutely quite apparent suffering from climate change. [*sighs*] They're very, very worried about all of their glaciers and their ice formations being impacted. What will that mean?

Au revoir

So now we come to the end of our little foray. And I must say a huge thank you to you for your patience, for your understanding, for your self-control in not expressing great, shall we say, at certain times great questioning or great, shall we say, dramatic reaction [*laughter*] to certain of my somewhat perhaps irrational pronouncements, or let's say more complex than one would be even interested in finding out the key to the complexity—I don't know. I hope to have some inkling of what this was all about someday, because up until now, it's just been a series of grunts and clicks and rattles and lisps on my part, and *lapsus mentis* here and there. And your wonderful equanimity through it all; for that, you deserve a special, absolutely special mention on the honor roll, Cameron.

Vanderscoff: Thank you, Miriam.

Ellis: A very, very affable and open—speaking of openness, open persona, which is quite an admirable trait, not to be found in everyone, particularly in someone of your great many decade-old experience in life—definitely not to be found among, shall we say, the less long-in-the-tooth scions of our culture. So, good for you. Kudos to you for your patience and calm and affability over these long hours. And I hope to have some time to look at what the upshot of all of this is going to be. Who knows?

Vanderscoff: Oh, definitely. Definitely we'll have a copy to you before too long. Just on my end, thank you so much for all of your time, all of your reflections, sharing all of these stories about this remarkable life that you've lived and are living, and for everything that you've done here—in all the communities you've been a part of, but especially for your contributions to this community, which is also, of course, special and dear to me.

Ellis: Well, UCSC has been both a dominant and dominating part of my life for lo unto five decades. And that's not exactly a walk in the park timewise. I owe a great deal to so many marvelous people, whom I've tried to mention—and I'm sure I've forgotten like about three-quarters of them—so many people who have listened to me, who have guided me, who have put up with me, who have helped me in so many ways down these crazy paths where fancy and sometimes very good fortune have taken me in my search to find out what life is all about. Because after all, that's what we're all doing, isn't it, in the end? And then, when the final nanosecond of elucidation occurs—just as, no doubt, we're checking out, that happens. Then that's life's last laugh, is it not? [*laughs*] “Eureka, I have found the famous *it*.”

Okay, well, so without saying *adieu*, we're saying *au revoir*.

Vanderscoff: We're saying *au revoir*. That's right, exactly.

Ellis: Okay. Because *adieu* is, you know, *final*. And we don't want it to be quite—

Vanderscoff: The curtain.

Ellis: —that *final*, right.

Vanderscoff: That's right, that's right.

Ellis: And let me please wish you, if I don't get a chance to say this little curtain speech here, all kinds of good luck with anything and everything that you undertake in what is, I'm sure, going to be an especially productive and generously contributory to many, many good, worthy, respectable, and admirable endeavors that you either conceive or become part of in what I hope will be, for you, a very long and fruitful and, above all, rewarding life. That's my wish for Monsieur Cameron, who has spent now a good many hours listening to a cackling monologue. *[laughs]*

Vanderscoff: It's been a joy and it's been an education, Miriam.

Ellis: Well, I appreciate those pretty words. That's very nice, very nice of you to say it. And I just wish for the present generation, the future generations of students at UCSC to be able to find some of the threads of positive, enriching, and unforgettable events in this magnificent environment.

Okay, all right. And if you are around and available in May of 2020, and if we are doing the Playhouse, I do hope you'll come to a performance. And you can come and say hello. That would be lovely to see you there.

Vanderscoff: Oh, gosh, if I am on this coast, I am there.

Ellis: Ah, wonderful. That's right, you may very well be on the other coast, yeah.

Vanderscoff: Well, I'll have to drop in and see how Flatbush is doing.

Ellis: Oh, I'm sure it's still flat and still bushy. [*laughter*] And good ol' New York, I hope it still manages to survive whatever climate change brings to the coastal areas. We too have a coastal area here, but quite a different one from yours.

Vanderscoff: This is right. Well, shall we leave it there, Miriam?

Ellis: Let's leave it there, absolutely.

Vanderscoff: Here, I'll unclip you.

Ellis: We've said our "*adieu*" or our "*au revoir*." I'll add, "Ciao!"

Appendices

Accolades

Now, I'd like to take some time to offer a "List of Accolades" as a small token of my appreciation for and recognition of the kind and supportive efforts which a large group of people have provided to me during my long affiliation with UCSC. I've mentioned a few of these fine colleagues in the interview itself, but I'd prefer to repeat myself here rather than forget to express my gratitude and thanks to some individuals, belated though the recognition may be. So please, if I've neglected to add you to my "kudos" list, please forgive the lapses in the memory of a nonagenarian and consider yourself thanked.

Going back to my arrival on campus in the early seventies, and during my grad student days, for his thoughtfulness, I'd like to say a big "Merci!" to Harry Berger, Professor of English Literature, who was a valued mentor, whose thoughtful advice and understanding were most welcome in those days. For the performances of "Les Trétaux d'essai," I've mentioned the reliable help of my fellow French lecturers and the frequent assistance of the Activities staff at Cowell. For the International Playhouse, before its name change in 2013, these colleagues were again of substantial help, especially with recruiting students to participate in the productions. I would like to thank three directors who picked up the torch when some of their colleagues retired and passed the challenge of directing their students in the new performances to allow their languages to continue participating. First, in Chinese, when Jackie Ku retired, Ting-Ting Wu took over the directing challenge and presented several excellent programs, since 2011. In Russian, Natalya Samokhina continued Bill Nickell's

admirable tradition of offering Russian works. In Spanish, when Paco Ramirez retired after having joined the IP in 2002 and directing about ten pieces over the years, Marta Navarro assumed the role of director for the Spanish piece annually. Towards the end of Marta's involvement, Carolina Castillo-Trelles stepped in and began directing her students, frequently presenting contemporary pieces, and we look forward to having her with us in MEIP for many years to come. ¡Gracias, Carolina!

We mentioned somewhere that in French, one of the pieces that we performed in 2012 was drawn from Ionesco's comic classic, "*La cantatrice chauv*," [*The Bald Soprano*]. The performance has been on YouTube, along with several other videos of Playhouse works. And at last reporting, the "Cantatrice" scenes had received more than 10,500 views over the years. So, I would like now to acknowledge and thank the following students who really achieved "ensemble-level" excellence in their interpretation of those scenes in the cast: Mary the maid was Brenda Houser; Monsieur Martin was Jonathan Bilbas; Madame Martin was Daphne Seale; Monsieur Smith was Jules LaCour, who also participated in the Playhouse two other times, making him a three-year veteran; Madame Smith was Bianca Gonzalez, who also was a Playhouse participant a few times; and the Fire Chief, whom we have discussed above, was Ben Lilly. So, quite belatedly, we say to these students, "Alors, bon travail, chers étudiants, félicitations, et merci!"

We would also like to acknowledge and thank, for their stalwart friendship and support, the members of the Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc, (SCOSI), most especially Lilli Hunter, who joined the group shortly after its inception and forty-three years later still plays a vital role in keeping SCOSI active, and helps in so many ways to keep it functioning smoothly. In similar

ways, just as Sakae Fujita has been in the Playhouse, Lilli has been a treasured and amiable partner and co-director of the Opera Society and its activities. She and I are delighted to have a comparatively new group of opera lovers who have joined us over the past few years, whom we are most gratified to have with us to carry on the existence and activities of the group. Our deep gratitude to the new board of directors, Michele Card and Suzanne Dowling, Marsha Keeffer, Sue Myers, and Marjorie Simon, who helped us in MEIP in 2019; they kindly served on the "Hospitality committee" (with Dionne Farquar and Marsh Leicester) to oversee refreshments at the Playhouse performances; it was a true coming together of town/gown cooperation. Before we leave our list of Accolades to SCOSI, a very special "Thank you" to our hard-working treasurer, Doug Urbanus, who is a model of energy and dedication to his voluntary activities with the group. In addition, we are especially grateful for his carefully-created programs, which are always impressively informative and most entertaining. Great appreciation is also due to two of our long-time, much-admired, and highly-prized members, Gitta Ryle and Faye Alexander; may you and all our cherished members enjoy good health for many more seasons of fine opera.

As for "kudos" to folks in the Lifelong Learners organization, now "OLLI" (the Osher Lifelong Learners Institute at UCSC) I would like to thank Lois Widom, who is in charge of planning their schedule of classes. Professor John Dizikes offered their very first class and he suggested that I might like to give opera classes for them, which I did annually from about 2000 until 2018. Among the many fine members of that organization, I'd like to express my thanks to my "techie;" I would like to express my deep thanks to Steve Zaslav, Mark Gordon, and Dennis Morris for their technical contributions to the first several opera classes. Most of all, my deep gratitude to Fred DeJarlais, who worked with me longer than his predecessors,

and developed quite an impressive knowledge of opera. Without Fred's crucial help, I could not have continued offering the classes for such an extensive time. Fred also deserves recognition of his technical expertise in his help for SCOSI as well, for which he has become the Technical Director and where he plays a crucial role in assisting members by making it possible for them to offer video illustrations of operatic excerpts in their programs, which are offered by different members each month. We all owe him an enormous debt of gratitude and admiration for the significant role he plays in making the presentations informative and enjoyable. Mille grazie, Fred.

Over the years, we have had the welcome support of many individuals on campus in creating announcements and publicity campaigns for the Playhouse. A heartfelt "thank you" to some of them: to Anita Grunwald, Gwen Jourdojmais, Sabrina Eastwood, and Dan White, and to their colleagues for their important help in getting the word out about forthcoming programs and in making the community aware of our presentations. A sincere "Thank you" to Scott McClelland for his help with publicizing the Playhouse in his fine online magazine, *Performing Arts, Monterey Bay*.

Going back to my early decades on campus, during the time I was associated with the Opera Workshop, I would like to acknowledge a few of the individuals in the Music Board (now Department) with whom I worked on various projects, particularly involving French texts and translation. I have already mentioned Sherwood Dudley, Professor Emeritus of Music, Thanks also to these Professors of Music: Leta Miller, now Emerita; to Anatole Leiken; to Edward Houghton, now Emeritus; and to John Hajdu. I would also like to thank Michael

McGushin and Irene Herrmann, staff pianists for the Music Department, who were both key contributors in preparing our Opera Workshop students for performances.

Another very deep bow of appreciation to Faye Crosby for introducing us to Alice Folkins, the Cowell Academic Programs Coordinator, and to Alice, who has recently done invaluable work to develop a web presence for the MEIP through the Cowell website. Deep appreciation to Cowell Provost Alan Christy, who has been a valued supporter of the Playhouse for many years. Great thanks also to Alice Yang, Provost of Stevenson for her ongoing encouragement and sustaining support. We would also like to thank past Cowell provosts for their assistance, among them: Faye Crosby, Deanna Shemek and Tyrus Miller, and Bill Ladusaw. We also appreciate the ongoing assistance of Carolyn Stevens, Department Manager, Department of Languages and Applied Linguistics, and wish to reaffirm our long-established appreciation for all the guidance and help that Lisa Leslie, Undergraduate Program Advisor to Language students, has afforded us over the years, and still gives us today.

And a final deep bow of appreciation, for their expertise, equanimity, and guidance, to Cameron Vanderscoff, my interlocutor, and to Irene Reti, Director of the Regional History Project at McHenry Library. A big “thank you” to Kathleen Rose, Faye Crosby, and Marieke Rothschild, for their crucial support of this project. Thank you to Geraldine Sproule, a community member who has made possible my participation in many of the activities I've been able to undertake for UC over almost a decade.

Three generations of our family have been closely associated with UCSC: as we have mentioned, Jonathan and Vicki earned their undergraduate degrees here, as did Colin, our sole grandchild, while I received my PhD from this university, as described in these pages. I

would like to thank my family, including Debra Trent, Vicki Trent, Jonathan and Susanne Trent, Colin Trent-Johnson, his wife, Angela, and their son, Nicholas, for the joyous and inspiring moments they have afforded me. I am immensely proud of my children for their accomplishments, some of which they have listed below for this project, and about which they had not cited several details until now. I am justly proud of these accomplishments and share these bios with the hope that my family will not be embarrassed by my doing so:

Debra Trent, M.S.N, R.N.: Debra dedicated her life to nursing until her retirement several years ago, and in the face of our current pandemic, her nine-year-long combat experience during the time of the AIDS epidemic seems ironically relevant. Here is what she describes as a major accomplishment of her life: From 1987 to 1996, Debra was a Staff RN II member of the Sherman Oaks Hospital (Immuno-suppressed Unit)—ISU (AIDS) Unit, one of the first LA hospital units dedicated exclusively to HIV+AIDS care. During this period, she was active as a member of the Bioethics Team, a participant in the work of the Community Education Outreach Speakers Team, and a member of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care (ANAC). In addition to her work in this challenging area of medicine, she has cared for patients whose problems represented a wide range of physical and mental maladies, dedicating her life to serving others by alleviating their pain and suffering to the best of her abilities.

Vicki Trent, Esq. holds a fifth degree blackbelt in judo (“5th Dan”). She studied for over thirty years with Ms. Keiko Fukuda, 10th Dan (April 12, 1913 – February 9, 2013), the highest-ranked judo woman in the history of that martial art. Vicki was Fukuda Sensei’s assistant at her judo club for many years in San Francisco, and has travelled extensively to teach and to officiate at tournaments.

Jonathan Trent, PhD: Thinking back on “accomplishments,” many things come to mind as milestones in his science career: dives in the submersible Alvin, Research cruises across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, getting the sequence of the Rosettasome, a job at NASA, trips all over the world, including Kamchatka, and a grant for his OMEGA project, among others. All these were milestones, but now looking back, what stands out most is his 30+ year relationship with his friend and life partner, Susanne.

Susanne J. Trent, PhD: One of her unique accomplishments was making the transition from a wonderful and comfortable life in Denmark to a life in the “wild west.” It has been like being an explorer, finding her way at the frontier with its challenges and joys. She’s had many extraordinary life experiences that have enriched her, without diminishing her Danish identity. She’s glad she took the leap and is grateful for my many memorable adventures with Jonathan and her extended family in California.

Farewell now, and thank you for letting me share some of that formative and long-abiding experience with you. “¡Qué le vaya bien!”

—*Miriam Ellis, June 2020*

[Abbreviated] Cumulative Bio-Bibliography

MIRIAM ELLIS, Lecturer in French

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

2005- called back to service-no salary, Senior Research Associate

- 1979-2004 Lecturer, Adjunct Lecturer, Visiting Lecturer, French, UCSC
- 1975-79 Academic Advisor, College VIII, UCSC
- 1975-77 Acting Instructor, Music Board, UCSC
- 1974-75 Teaching Assistant Theatre Arts; T.A. Music; T.A. Core Course, Merrill
College, UCSC
- 1973-79 Introductory, Intermediate, Advanced French language and literature
courses; opera courses; Women in Literature; Romanticism and the Arts;
Adult Education, Santa Cruz City Schools
- 1973-74 Teaching Assistant, Literature; TA Theater Arts, UCSC
- 1971-73 Teaching Assistant, French, UCSC

EDUCATION

- 1979 Completion of doctoral dissertation, LOPE DE VEGA'S "LA
FRANCESILLA": A CRITICAL EDITION TOGETHER WITH A METRIC
TRANSLATION
- 1971-75 Ph.D course work at UCSC
Ph.D granted June, 1979

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND ACTIVITY

Memberships in Honorary Societies

Alpha Mu Gamma

Alpha Gamma Sigma (lifetime)

OSHER Lifelong Learning Institute (Lifetime Honorary Member)

Honors, Awards, Grants

2015 •Grants from Marieke Rothschild \$12,000, operating expenses, MEIP; \$250,000 for full Endowment

2014 •Grant for MEIP from Marieke Rothschild, \$10,000

2013 •International Playhouse renamed “Miriam Ellis International Playhouse” (MEIP); Endowment reaches first financial goal.

2002 •Lifetime Honorary Membership, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

2001 •Grants for INTERNATIONAL PLAYHOUSE project, \$4000

1999 •Grants for MELANGES THEATRAUX French theater production, \$600

•Named Chevalier des Palmes Académiques by

French Ministry of Education; newspaper and TV coverage

1998 •Grants for production of "Le génie de Molière," \$650

1997 •Grant from French caucus for travel to France, \$400

1996 •Florence Gould Foundation award for production of LES VISITANDINES, \$14,750, matched by NEH for two new French courses,\$12,000= \$26,750

- 1995 •NEH/ACE grant, "Next Steps in FLAC"; \$12000 for project, "Cultural Awareness Training Seminars" (CATS)
- 1995 •Grant from Provost for costs of video of Ionesco theater production, \$300
- 1994-96 •NEH grant, "Foreign Language in Expanded Domains," \$120,000 + \$30,000 in matching funds
- 1994-95 •Instructional Improvement Grant for production of "Hommage à Ionesco," Spring, 1995, joint award with Angela Elsey for *Maison Francophone*
- 1994-95 •Grant from the Santa Cruz City Arts Commission to Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc., for senior center and nursing home performances, \$1000
- 1994 •Travel grant to attend National Opera Association conference, Toronto, French caucus, \$400
- 1993-95 •Seed funds from Humanities Division. \$2100
- 1992-94 •NEH grant, "Foreign Language in Context," for implementation of new courses, \$142,000 (\$122,000 + \$20,000 [\$10,000 in matching funds])
- 1992 •Travel grant from Graduate and Research Division Dean to attend meeting of NEH Project Directors, Washington, D.C., \$1,000
- 1991-92 •Santa Cruz Arts Commission grant for performances of classical music for seniors and general public (SCOSI), \$1,350
- 1991 •SERVICE LINGUISTIQUE DU CONSULAT DE FRANCE, San Francisco, grant to cover production of two plays in French, \$2,000
- 1990-91 •Santa Cruz Arts Commission grant for performances of classical music for seniors and general public (SCOSI), \$1,250
- 1989-90 •Santa Cruz Arts Commission grant for performances of classical music for seniors and general public (SCOSI), \$1,200

- 1988-89 •Santa Cruz City Arts Commission, grant for performances of classical music for seniors and general public, (SCOSI), \$1000
- 1988-89 •Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County, grant for Barati Ensemble concerts, \$750
- 1988 •Honorarium for participation in Leta Miller/Nohema Fernandez concert, narrator for "Bilitis," \$100
- 1987 •Santa Cruz City Arts Commission, grant for performances of classical music and opera in nursing homes and for general public (SCOSI), \$1,000
- 1987 •Instructional Improvement Grant to continue work on Computer Assisted French, in summer, \$275
- 1987 •Honoraria for participation in two concerts with Leta Miller as narrator in French, \$200
- 1986 •Santa Cruz City Arts Commission, \$1,000, for musical theatre performances in the community and senior centers
- 1985 •Instructional Improvement Grant from Humanities for Computer Assisted French project (CAF), \$2,000
- 1985 •Honorarium for participation in Leta Miller recital program, French narration, \$25
- 1985 Faculty Research Grant for computer terminal and printer, \$1200
- 1985 Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County grant to produce Latin-American classical music concert, \$1,500
- 1984 Honorarium from Houghton-Mifflin Publishers, critique of French text-book, APPEL, \$50.
- 1984 Honorarium for translation of paper from English to French, "Recent Findings in Lully Ms," by Professor John Hajdu, \$150.

- 1984 Honorarium for lecture, "The Dreyfus Affair", \$25.
- 1984 Grant, SC Arts Council, for performances in nursing homes and senior centers, \$1,000
- 1984 Grant, Division of Humanities for travel and project, LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS, with M. Frosch and E. Dávila, \$2,300.
- 1983 Grant from SPECTRA, SC County, for Elementary School Musical Theatre Program, \$400
- 1983 Faculty Research Grant, for transcription of opera translation, THE ELIXIR OF LOVE, \$750
- 1983 Grant from SC Arts Council for Musical Theatre Programs in nursing homes and senior centers, \$750
- 1982 Travel grant, Humanities Division, UCSC, for conference to read French translations, \$200
- 1982 Invitation to Literary Translation Conference, University of Kansas, Lawrence, honorarium \$150
- 1982 Grant from SC City Arts Council for opera programs, \$900
- 1982 Grant from Cultural Council SC County for SPECTRA performances in elementary schools, \$400
- 1981 Grant from SC City Arts Council for opera excerpts programs for seniors and general public, \$1200
- 1980 Grant from SC County Office of Education to bring opera to elementary schools, \$300
- 1979-80 Grant from SC City Arts Council to bring opera to seniors and elementary schools, \$1200

WRITINGS AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Articles in Professional Journals

2013- • Editorial staff, English translation and editing, ResMusica, Paris, on-line classical music journal, numerous articles, reviews, interviews

1992 • Translation of article, "Démocratie et société en Haiti: Les Structures de Domination et la Résistance au changement" by Suzy Castor

1981 • Translation of article into French of "Le Mariage de Figaro de 1793", by Sherwood Dudley, Professor of Music, UCSC

1980 • Translation of article by Professor Carolyn Clark, Anthropology, "Land and Food, Women and Power," into French, published in *Africa: Journal of International African Institute* (London)

Revisions

2016 • Publication, piano-vocal score LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (THE FLEXIBLE FIGARO)

2015- • Final revisions, additions, translations, editing, manuscript (570 pp.) of vocal score LE NOZZE DIO FIGARO, for publication

2013-14 • Revision, performing edition THE FLEXIBLE FIGARO, extensive addition of substitute dialogue from Beaumarchais; revised

translation Da Ponte libretto for performances in Texas and UK

• Revision of THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO for performances by the Chance Theater, Orange County, CA

2001 • Revision of opera translation, DON PASQUALE for

supertitles

- Revision of THE FLEXIBLE FIGARO for performances
by Berkeley Opera
- 2000 •Revision of book, THE ESSENTIALS OF FRENCH,
7^h edition
- 1997 •Revision of translation of opera, L'ELISIR D'AMORE
 - Revision of translation of LES VISITANDINES, 2 Act
version
- 1995 •Revision of book, THE ESSENTIALS OF FRENCH,
Research & Education Assn., publishers

Creative Activities

- 2019 •Producer (with Renée Cailloux) Miriam Ellis International Playhouse XIX
 - Director, French segment, MEIP XIX
 - Translation of text for supertitles for “On fait le marché avec
Papa,” (Shopping with Papa) for MEIP XIX
 - Translation of LeMansec book reviews, “La Nilsson,” “On the Road
and off the Record with Leonard Bernstein,”for ResMusica
 - Editing of English translation of ResMusica “Leif Ove Andsnes”
interview
 - Additions to “Arias in English” site: 27 translations of French, German,
Italian works (now at 75 entries)
 - Lecture, Temple Beth El, “Favorite Tenors and Tenor Favorites”
 - Program, Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc. “The Transcendent Trio”
 - Editing of articles for *Calafia*, Cartography Journal, Fall, 2019 edition

2018 •Lecture, Dominican Oaks, "Puccini, Bel canto Master"

- Creation of website, "Arias In English Translation;" bilingual presentations of 48 texts with metric (often singable) translations
- Editing of articles for *Calafia*, Cartography Journal, Spring 2018 edit.

•Class for OSHER Lifelong Learning Institute, "Great Scenes from Favorite Operas"

- Translation of "Famous Father Girl" review, by LeMansec, ResMusica
- Editing, English translation of "Samuel Hasselhorn Award," ResMusica

2017 • **Translation of book review**, "The Bridgewater Sonata (Mulatto Sonata), novel by Emmanuel Dongala, by LeMansec, for ResMusica

- Translation of opera performance review by LeMansec, "Les contes d'Hoffmann," LA Opera, for ResMusica
- Class for OSHER Lifelong Learners, " Celebrating the Chorus in Opera"

- Translation of "Tamsin Waley Interview," for ResMusica
- Translation of "Toscanini biography" LeMansec, for ResMusica

2016 *Class for OSHER Lifelong Learners, "Operetta," co-taught with Tom Lehrer

- Translation of LeMansec book review, "La vraie Traviata," for ResMusica
- Lecture, Temple Beth El, "Two Divas and a Primo Tenore," Honorarium

•Lecture, Dominican Oaks, "Sutherland, Horne, and Pavarotti."

2015 •3 essays "On Opera" for SCOSI Newsletter (quarterly)

- Translation of super-titles, MEIP, "Bourgeois Gentleman," "La Lacune"

- Translation of book review, “Women Composers”, from French, for ResMusica
- Translation of book review (in French) by Hervé Le Mansec, “El Sistema,” for on-line magazine, ResMusica, Paris
- Lecture, Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc. (SCOSI) “The Artistry of Fischer-Dieskau”
- Class for OSHER Lifelong Learners, “Sweet and Low: The Darker Artistry of Opera”
- * Lecture, Temple Beth El, “Family Matters in Opera,” Honorarium
- Three “Essays on Opera” for SCOSI Newsletter (quarterly)
- 2014 • Translation of LeMansec review for ResMusica, “Bernstein’s Letters”
- Class for OSHER Lifelong Learners, “From Page to Stage,” with guests John Dizikes, Tom Lehrer, Michael Warren
 - Lecture for Temple Beth El, “The Timeless Appeal of Bizet’s CARMEN.” Honorarium.
 - Translation super-titles of “Marius” and “Fanny” for MEIP
- 2011 • Commissioned by Lee University, Tennessee, to adapt FIGARO for Feb. 2012 performances
 - Translation, *Tartuffe*, by Molière, in progress
- Interview for TV show, *The Next Fifty Years*, channel 27
- Contributions of 20 aria translations to web-based *Aria Database*
- 2 lectures on *Verismo Opera* for Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc.
- 2010-13 • Courses for Lifelong Learners in conjunction with Met HD

simulcasts ; 25 lectures

2010 • *Elixir of Love* super-titles used for UCSC Opera Workshop performances

- New courses: *Bel canto (Italian; French)* for Lifelong Learners, UCSC; 12 lectures

2007,09 • Produced program, "An Evening of World Music," at Cowell,

2007-2010 • Cowell College course, *From Page to Stage*, winter quarter

2006-08 • New courses, *European and American Romanticism* for Lifelong Learners, UCSC

2002-05 • *American Musical* course for American Studies/Cowell, with participation by Lifelong Learners

2001 *Sub-titles for video of International Playhouse

- TV interview with team of directors from International Playhouse

- Performing translation of Offenbach's LA BELLE HELENE

- Lecture, "New Voices in Opera," for Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc.

- Translation, SCHOOL FOR MOTHERS, for super-titles projection as part of INTERNATIONAL PLAYHOUSE performances

2000 • New course, AMERICAN MUSICALS: THEMES & ISSUES, with Prof. John Dizikes and Tom Lehrer

- Preparation of THE ELIXIR OF LOVE for super-title projection for UCSC Opera Workshop performances

- Translation of ORPHÉE AUX ENFERS

- Lecture, "Lesser Known French Operas," for Santa

Cruz Opera Society, Inc.

- French diction coach for CARMEN production, UCSC

Opera Theater

1999- •Guest appearances on MONDAY NIGHT AT THE OPERA, KAZU,

Spring and Fall Membership drives, twice annually, plus others

- Opera in Translation," discussion for OPERA radio program,

KAZU, guest appearance with Prof. John Dizikes

- Lecture, "Those Marvelous Mezzos: From Monteverdi to

Menotti," for Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc.

- New course, COMEDY AND CULTURE, taught with Prof. John

Dizikes in English and French, NEH funded

- New course: FRENCH DICTION FOR SINGERS, under NEH grant

1997 •New course: Production of LES VISITANDINES, 3 Act version of the opera, in new

English translation, at new Performing Arts Center, UCSC under Florence

Gould grant; world and American premier; producer and director

1996 •Translation of Ionesco's LA LACUNE (into English) for simultaneous projection

on TV screens during performances

1996 •Planning and implementation of *Cultural Awareness Training*

Seminars (CATS) for spring, fall, winter, 1996-97, sponsored by

NEH/ACE

1995 •Performances of LE NOZZE DI FIGARO/LE MARIAGE DE FIGARO,

West Washington State University and Pennsylvania University

- New course, team-taught with John Dizikes, *Offenbach, Social*

Critic, in English and French, under NEH grant

- 1994 •New course, LOUIS XIV ET SA COUR, funded by NEH as part of FLIC grant
- 1993 •Lecture, *Le Mariage de Figaro* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*: Similarities and Differences"
- 1992 •New courses: French 6; Theory and Practice of Literary Translation
- 1991 •New course: "L'esprit comique sur la scène française"
- 1990-91 •Program notes, French translations for concerts by Santa Cruz Chamber Players
- 1989 •Translator/Interpreter for Mme Danielle Mitterand at public lecture, *France-Liberté*, during her campus visit.
- New course, "La Revolution et les Arts," taught in conjunction with Bicentennial commemoration
- 1988-89 •Concert series, YOUNG ARTISTS SHOWCASE SERIES for Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc., six concerts; production, narration, program notes, text translations
- 1987 •4 performances in French of Debussy's "Bilitis" (for flute, piano, and narrator) with Leta Miller and Nohema Fernandez, Watsonville, Stanford University, UC San Diego, UCSC
- Initial translation of LES VISITANDINES, (Three act version) opera by F. Devienne, based on Professor Dudley's research
- 1986 •Producer, narrator (SCOSI) concert, "An Autumn Serenade"
- 1985 •Initial development of Computer Assisted French (CAF) Program for all levels of French students
- 1984 •Produced phonetics method and cassette tape for Learning Laboratory, UCSC, ("French Phonetics for Americans") to be used by all levels of students
- 1984 •Lecture, "Emile Zola and the Dreyfus Affair, UCSC

- Translation of paper, "Recent Findings in Lully's Ms.," by John Hajdu (Professor of Music), from English to French
- Editorial comments for basic French text, *Decouverte et Creation*, for Houghton Mifflin Co., 4th edition
- 1980 • Translation of article from French by Professor Anne Hiller, "Lamartine et l'indicible"
- 1979 • "Politics and Art," simultaneous English translation of Eugene Ionesco's French text at public lecture during his visit to UCSC

PUBLISHED WRITINGS

Books and Monographs

- 2016 • Co-author with Sherwood Dudley, *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Flexible Figaro) piano-vocal score, new translation of Italian libretto; includes substitute dialogue translated from Beaumarchais's play, *Le mariage de Figaro*
- 1994 • Author, THE ESSENTIALS OF FRENCH, Piscataway, New Jersey: Research and Education Association
- 1988 • Co-author COLLEGE BOARD FRENCH ACHIEVEMENT TEST PREPARATION BOOK, Research and Education Assoc.
- 1982 • Co-translator with Leta Miller of *Chansons From the French Provinces, 1530-1550*, in *The Northern Region*, volume 2, Berkeley, Musica Sacra et Profana
- 1979 • Consultant for translation from French, with Leta Miller, of *Rameau's Theoretical Writings*

Chapters in Books

- 1994 •Translation of article, "Démocratie et société en Haiti: Les Structures de Domination et la Résistance au changement" by Suzy Castor, re-printed in book.
- 1992 •Translation (English to French), summary, in *Women in the Labor Movement*.
- 1991 •"The Poetics of Exile: Representative Latina Voices," in Festschrift for Bill Shipley, including translations from Spanish
- 1990 •Translation of Introduction and various poems (Spanish to English), REVISTA MUJERES, vol. 7, Nos. 1 and 2.
- 1988 •Translation of four essays from French for *Studies on Lully and the Music of the French Baroque: Essays in Honor of James R. Anthony*, edited by John Hajdu, Professor of Music, UCSC, Cambridge U.P., 1989
- 1987 •Translation of poetic anthology, *Nuevo ciclo del caballo*, by Elisa Dávila, from Spanish to English
- 1987 •Translations of two poems by Daisy Zamora, in REVISTA MUJERES, vol. 4, #2
- 1987 •Translation of poetry in IXOK AMAR-GO, a bilingual anthology, published September, ed. Zoe Anglesey, *Bilingual Poetry Anthology*. Penobscot, Maine: Granite Press, pp.334,335,360,361.
- 1987 •Contributions to WOMEN WRITERS OF SPANISH AMERICA, AN ANNOTATED BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHICAL GUIDE, with E. Dávila, ed. Diane E. Marting, New York: Greenwood Press

Director /Producer: French Theater; MEIP, (Miriam Ellis International Playhouse, in 2013)

2019 •ON FAIT LE MARCHÉ AVEC PAPA

2018 •FANNY, scenes

2017 •LA FOLLE DE CHAILLOT, scenes

2016 •TARTUFFE, excerpts

2015 •LE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME, excerpt; LA LACUNE, complete

2014 •MARIUS, FANNY, scenes

•2013 •LE MALADE IMAGINAIRE, excerpts

2012 *LA CANTATRICE CHAUVE, Act I

2011 •ECOLE DES FEMMES, excerpts

2010 •RHINOCÉROS, excerpts

2009 •LA FARCE DE MAITRE PATHELIN, Act I

2008 •LE MALADE IMAGINAIRE, Act I

2007 •FANNY, excerpts

2006 •LE MARIAGE DE FIGARO, excerpts

2005 •LA LACUNE, entire play

2004 •L'AMOUR MÉDECIN, Act I

2003 •UNE SOIRÉE à VERSAILLES: LES FABLES, LES LETTRES

de MME DE SÉVIGNÉ, TARTUFFE, excerpts

2002 •VARIÉTÉS THÉÂTRAUX: LE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME

and LA CANTATRICE CHAUVE, selected scenes

•2001 •ECOLE DES MERES, abridged, as part of premier season

of the International Playhouse Project

1999 •MÉLANGES THÉÂTRAUX, scenes from 4 French plays

- 1998 •LE GÉNIE DE MOLIÈRE, scenes from 4 plays
- 1997 •LES VISITANDINES, opéra comique; World premier; director,
producer, translator
- 1995 •HOMMAGE à IONESCO, *La Lacune* and *Scènes choisies*
- 1992 •UN PROGRAMME DE COMEDIE: *L'Amour médecin*, avec musique et danse; *La Cantatrice chauve*
- Translation (French to English) of *L'Amour médecin* for simultaneous projection on TV screens during performances of the play.
- 1992 •Collaborated with M. Jean-Marc Caré during his week-long Improvisation workshop, under auspices of French Consulate, San Francisco.
- 1990 •*Huis Clos*, *La Folle de Chaillot*, Acte II
- 1989 •*Le Mariage de Figaro*, Beaumarchais, (entire play)
- 1987 •"Le théâtre comme instrument pédagogique," atelier au congrès de l'AATF, Journée de Printemps, UCSC
- 1985 •Nimes, France, "Soirée d'adieu". Produced and directed program of theatre in French by students from UCSC
- 1983 •Directed Act I of the opera, THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO (English translation); *Underworld* scene from ORPHEE ET EURIDICE (en français); excerpts from LES VISITANDINES
- 1982 •*Huis clos* and Acte II, *La Folle de Chaillot*; *scènes choisies*
- 1981 •*L'amour médecin* (avec musique) and *La Dame de Bronze* (2 pièces complètes)
- 1980 •Une Soirée de Théâtre: *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du hasard*, and *Scènes choisies*

- 1979 •Translator, guide, interpreter for M. et Mme Eugène Ionesco for the month of May, during his visit to the campus as part of the *Littérature vivante* program
- 1974-78 •Stage director for University Opera Workshop
- 1973 •*Une soirée de théâtre et de musique : La Farce de Maître Pathelin* and *Scènes choisies*
- 1972 •*Un programme de Poésie et théâtre, Scènes choisies* de 5 pièces
- 1971-72 •*L'Avare (The Miser)*, Theatre Guild Production; French translation, performance, and Assistant Director, Barn Theatre, January 1972

University Service

2005 •Retired; called back to service, no salary

2001- •Producer, Director, Founder, UCSC INTERNATIONAL PLAYHOUSE;
new name (endowed 2013): MIRIAM ELLIS INTERNATIONAL
PLAYHOUSE (MEIP)

•Member Language Curriculum Committee, Language
Program

•Associate Chair, Language Program

2000-01 •Academic Adviser, Cowell College

•Member, Campus Fulbright Faculty Committee

•ELIXIR OF LOVE translation given to UC Santa Cruz Opera Theater for performance
& supertitles; 4 public performances

•Member Language Personnel Committee, Language Program

•Chair, EAP French selection committee

- Chair, Campus Fulbright Faculty Committee

1990-93 •Chair, French Caucus, UCSC Language Committee

1988-89 •Member search committee and Pool search committee, French caucus

1988-89 •Member Language and Culture (Language Studies) Major Committee

1988-89 •Member Language Personnel Curriculum Committee

1988-1998 •Chair, Fulbright Faculty Committee

1987-88 •Member Fulbright Faculty Committee

1986 •Chair, search committee, French Language Caucus, French faculty positions

1985-87 •Chair, French Caucus, UCSC Language Committee

1985 •Director, French Quarter in Nimes, France

1984 •Translator and interpreter for Myriam Bonnin, French accordionist, for radio interview and seminar, Cabrillo Music Festival, August

1984 •Invited by chancellor to serve on University Hearing Committee

Other

1999 •Five performances of THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO by Berkeley

Opera, reviewed in OPERA NEWS, July 2001 and by on-line critics

•Lecture on CARMEN, presented for classes of two colleagues in French Program

1994 •Chair, Language Program Brochure Committee; generated brochure, "Foreign Languages at UCSC."

1993-95 •Member, Language Studies Committee

1993-97 •Education Abroad Program Selection Committee chair for

France applicants

- 1993-94 •Directed 3-day faculty study workshops in conjunction with two NEH grants, FLIC and FLIED.
- 1991 •UCSC representative at state-wide EAP Subcommittee Meeting in Los Angeles
- 1991 •Hosted visit by President, Institute for American Universities, Aix-en Provence
- 1990-98•Member, EAP Selection Committee for France; Chair 1992-98.
- 1990-98 •Language Studies major committee
- 1988-89 •Thesis director for 15 L/S, L/C majors; (14 in French; 1 in Spanish); two theses earned Chancellor's Undergraduate Award
- 1980-89 •Faculty sponsor French Club
- 1988-89 •Faculty Adviser, editor, SPEAKING IN TONGUES, the Foreign Language Newsletter, v.I, No.1 and v.II, No.1
- 1988-89 •Conversion, adaptation of Computer Assisted French Program to Macintosh (Maclang)
- 1987 •Foire Francaise (French fair) organized
- 1986 •Education Abroad Program Committee Member
- 1986 •Devised and administered EQE (Entrance Qualifying Exam) for French Language Studies majors; supervised senior theses
- 1985 •Observed student teacher in French at SC High School, for report to UCSC Education Committee
- 1984- •Language Studies Major Advisor (French)
- 1984- •Director, Senior Theses, Language **Studies majors (French)**

- 1984- •Committee member, Senior Oral Comprehensive Exams, Language Studies
- 1984- •Adviser, Language Studies major (French)
- 1982-84 •Faculty sponsor, French club
- 1978-79 •Advisor to two special students from Montpellier University, France 1976-79
- 1976- •Founder (with Sherwood Dudley) and General Director, SCOSI (Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc.), a non-profit organization

OUTSIDE PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Membership or Activities in Professional Associations

- 2000- Member of OPERA America
- 1994- National Opera Association
- 1994- A.A.U.W.
- 1979-80 Member, Resource Committee, Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County

Papers Presented at Professional Meetings

- 2000 "Offenbach as Satirist," presented at IN AND OUT OF OPERA, a conference at UCSC
- 1997 Paper presented at ACE conference, Washington, D.C., "Cultural Awareness, Theory and Practice"
- 1994 "Second Language Acquisition and F/L Pedagogy," presented at NEH Summer Workshop, UCSC

- 1994 "Introduction a l'écriture féminine antillaise," presented at the *Espaces Francophones* conference held on campus in Spring, 1994. Helped design brochure for conference
- 1992 "Recent Scholarship in F/L Pedagogy and Learning and the Role of F/L in the Humanities," presented at NEH Summer Seminar.
- 1990 "Beyond Constraints: Translating Opera," presented at *Translating for Performance* Conference, UCSC, together with live performance of selected translated arias.
- 1989 "The Poetics of Exile," at annual conference, Simposio: Conversos y otras Minorias, Homenaje a Joseph H. Silverman, San Diego State University
- 1987 "Le théâtre comme instrument pedagogique," Annual Meeting, American Association of Teachers of French, UCSC
- 1984 "Reading of French and Francophone Poetry," First Annual Conference on Foreign Literature, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas
- 1982 Translations of representative operatic works (DIE FLEDERMAUS; DON PASQUALE) and literary texts (LA FRANCESILLA) at Literary Translation Conference, University of Kansas, Lawrence, April

Editorial or Board Service to Publications

- 2018- Editorial Board, *Calafia*, Journal of Cartography, editing
- 2013- Editorial Board, ResMusica, Paris: English Translator, editor
- 1985-90 Contributor, translations of poems by various women

REVISTA MUJERES

- 1984 Consultant, vol. I, #1, REVISTA MUJERES, layout, editing;

translation of Introduction and two poems

About the Interviewer and Editors

Cameron Vanderscoff lives in New York City, where he is an oral historian, writer, and educator, working with Columbia University, the Apollo Theater, Tina Brown, the Narrative Trust and other projects. He is a UCSC alum (2011) in literature and history, earned an M.A. in oral history from Columbia in 2015, and has consulted widely. He has worked with the Regional History Project as an interviewer since 2011, and is the coeditor (along with Irene Reti and Sarah Rabkin) of the new (2020) Regional History Project anthology *Seeds of Something Different: An Oral History of the University of California, Santa Cruz*.

Irene Reti is the director of the Regional History Project, where she has worked since 1989 conducting and publishing oral histories. Reti has a B.A. (Environmental Studies and Women's Studies) from UCSC and an MA in History from UCSC. She is also the publisher of HerBooks, a nationally known feminist press and is a landscape photographer, writer, and small press publisher. She is the coeditor (along with Cameron Vanderscoff and Sarah Rabkin) of the new (2020) Regional History Project anthology *Seeds of Something Different: An Oral History of the University of California, Santa Cruz*.