INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR KATHERINE TACHAU

Kane Marquardt and Noah Doll
March 3rd, 2014

Key
KM: Kane Marquardt
ND: Noah Doll
KT: Katherine Tachau

Kane Marquardt: The date is March 4th 2014 this is Kane Marquardt

Noah Doll: I’m Noah Doll we are interviewing Katherine Tachau.

KM: What is it about history that intrigued you to become a history professor?

Katherine Tachau: I think because my father had majored in history in college and my mother became a professor of history when I was a child I never learned to think about the world any other way. So I thought I was not going to be a historian like my mother like most daughters I was going to be anything but what my mother was. So I was interested in Archeology and learning languages but I always thought of languages through etymology which is kind of history. I also was the first grandchild of both sides of the family so all the adults told me about the history of the family which I discovered later in life that my younger brother and sister didn’t get. So to me it helps us understand who we are in a very fundamental way.

KM: If you had a favorite historian who would it be and why would they be your favorite historian?

KT: Well I think the historian who had the most impact on getting me interested in the middle ages was a person named Brian Tierney. Who wrote a history of papal infallibility in which he was looking at medieval lawyers and medieval theologians and their sources to try to establish which I think he always seemed to convince me that the idea that the pope is infallible is a modern 19th century invention. And that in the Middle Ages the people who started to come up with the idea were the people who were the popes enemies and trying to keep one pope from undoing what the previous one had done. Now I grew up in a totally un catholic background didn’t know any Catholics till I went to graduate school I read other books but this was the one that just methodologically was most exciting and showed me that you could find a contemporary problem and show that it has been completely misunderstood.

KM: What is your favorite course to teach and why?

KT: I think my favorite course is ancient and medieval science but it would be hard to choose between that my course on middle east and Mediterranean from Alexander to Shulman, which I
invented. So I’ll tell you the ancient medieval science is a course that I hope gets people to think about what knowledge is and how its built up and to what extents its culturally influenced and to what extent it involves individual curiosity and it allows people to see that religion and science have no usually been hostile to each other in history. That the condition we have in the United States since the introduction of Darwin’s theory is really rather anomaly in human history and it introduces people to lots of different cultures. So that’s one reason I like it and it tends to get students from a wide range of disciplines from biology and chemistry and mathematics to history and literature. The one I invented which I call to myself Alexander to Shulman was sparked by 9/11 because that happened the day before my first day of classes that year. And I walked in to class and thought it was to big of an event to ignore but I didn’t know quite how to treat it so I just walked into the first class that day and asked the students if they wanted to talk about it and if so what they thought. And I discovered in the course of the conversation that no body in the room knew anything about Islam and in the history of science they’re the people who made modern science really possible by what they developed. And then I walked home that night and my cousin sent an email saying that the Muslims should be bombed literally to the moon and of course you can’t literally do that and what have they ever done for human kind? So I wrote back and said, “have you ever heard of the Taj Mahal?” and he said, “well what have they done lately?” So I decided to think about what a history of civilization or history of western civilization would look like if it hadn’t been invented in England around the time of the First World War but had been invented in Taron. How would the world look? So that’s what that course really is and I’ve learned so much from it each semester cause I’m very aware of the parts of the course where I’m covering stuff I don’t really know much so that what I tend to learn a lot from. And I tend to get students a few students from the Middle East who often have very different points of view about the same subject in the class so it tends to spark more discussion than many big classes. That’s a long answer.

**KM:** While I was doing a little research I noticed that it said you were knowledgeable in 7 languages? Is that correct?

**KT:** Yeah

**KM:** What made you want to peruse so many foreign languages and what is your favorite to speak?

**KT:** I should tell you my favorite to speak is Latin but that’s not true. This goes back to why I became a historian I think. So I was born five years after World War II ended in Louisville, KT and my parent’s friends included various refugees from Hitler. I thought their accents were cute and they of course were trying not to have accented English but they started teaching me to count in German and French up to ten which I thought was cool and then when I was eight my mother was has gone back to school and was working on her masters thesis which was about railroads the Louisville Nashville railroad and she went out to interview a women who I thought was incredibly old then is probably younger then I am. She seemed very elderly who is the granddaughter of the founder of the Louisville Nashville railroad. And who had known her
grandfather very well. So my mother was doing hat your doing. And she took me along and the women's house was a converted mill so it was a very interesting house. But I was sent off just to read in the living room and I noticed her bookshelf were full of books in different languages. And when they were through she came back and told me what the languages were and I asked her why she didn’t have all in English and she said well you know its different to read Greta in German than it is in English. It feels different and I thought when I’m her age I wanted to be able to do that. So I started studying languages in school as it was possible and I discovered I really loved the way you can think things in different languages that you cant in your own. Then I went to France for the first time with my parents when I was almost seventeen and my maternal grandmother went a long and she had studied French forty years before add her French was terrible. Instead of calling for a garçon a waiter she called for a gargoyl. And I thought when I got back there is no point in learning languages if you forget them. So I was always looking for a career where I would continue to use the languages I like so when I got in trans with medieval things in college and created a major in medieval studies I realized id found a field in which I could always use these languages. So that’s why so it’s turned out it’s been a great advantage to have them its fun for me.

**ND:** We can continue off you were talking about your earlier life we can keep going with that if you want to expand on that tell us about your school experiences through high school and college?

**KT:** Okay well I went public schools all the way through until I got to college. I realize in retrospect I went to schools in the best-funded neighborhoods in Kentucky so I probably got the best possible public education at that time. I had wonderful teachers, I had a lot of lousy teachers and I saw the harm that bad teachers could do. I have two friends who committed suicide and I had a lot to do with the way the teachers bullied them I think. From 4th grade on I was in a small group that was an advanced program. I was in the first 4th grade class that they founded that year so their was 20 of us who were in classes together all the way through senior year. So that’s why I can blame a few teachers. So I learned from them that a teacher can do a lot of harm to people. But I also had great great science teachers great Spanish teacher from 4th grade on a wonderful Latin teacher and an English teacher my senior year who was terrific. And a world history teacher who was very good and who wrote in my yearbook that year that I was going to be a historian but I didn’t know it. And I thought she was not very good at predicting. So that was Ms. Crocket.

**KT:** So in 8th grade well I should back up my parents were very active in the civil rights movement. And in 8th grade I had a teacher who was a right wing republican a member of the john birch society and she didn’t like people who were interested in civil rights because this would have been ’63 ’64 so it was really heating up. She didn’t like democrats and she didn’t like Jews and I counted on all three counts. So she began systematically failing me in history but she had this odd way of doing it. She was very lazy I realize now she would throw pop quizzes and then pass the quizzes around the class so people were grading each other. And then she would enter it in the grade book and what she entered into the grade book for me never
corresponded with what was on the quizzes actually had. So my mother invited me to have my
two best friends, really my two only friends in school at that point girls are really like come over
and study and we worked on homework together and we didn’t copy from each other we agreed
on answers. We did this for 6 weeks and we were able to demonstrate the other two girls got A’s
and I got F ‘so my parents went with that to the principal with this and instead of being failed I
was bumped down into the superior class as apposed to advanced class so I think that’s when I
learned about thinking creatively about evidence actually and when I was in the superior class I
had something I’ve never had before and that was a study hall. Id always had full schedule
before that but they thought you couldn’t take as many courses and study hall had two hundred
noisy people in it. I don’t know if they still have that in high schools it was a complete waste of
time as far as I’m concerned. So starting about January the associate principal asked for
volunteers to help schedule all the students for the classes for the following year. Which was
done by hand this was long before computers I volunteered and got out of study hall and so I
worked very hard at that so I was invited back the next year and I just scheduled myself right
back into the advanced programs and into taking al the languages I wanted. And no one ever
challenged it much to my surprise. So the following years of school were really sophomore,
junior, senior year were really wonderful for me. And so my parents had gone to Oberlin it never
really occurred to me to go anywhere else for college so I applied to Oberlin got in I been good
in theater science and I thought I would do one of those things for a career. I got into Oberlin I
majored in history for my first semester then decided that was not for me. And so I majored in
Spanish because id had so many classes I could pass out of half the required classes for the major
and figured I could get through I had to have a major I wasn’t interested in having a major and so
I could take one course each semester till I graduated Id have a major. So I tried lots of different
courses there and about the end of my junior year I realized I was sort of tired none of my
courses having anything to do with each other. And I looked at what I had and realized I had a lot
of medieval courses and if I took nothing but medieval courses my senior year I could have a
second major in medieval studies so I got a couple advisors and did that. So I was not an ideal
student in college. I was about a C plus student until my senior year when I suddenly started
getting all A’s. Because I was finally doing something I wanted to do. So I’ve always been aware
that there are a lot of very good students who can amount to something who are not going to be
good students in college. And I then got married for the first time to someone at Oberlin and we
moved back to Kentucky where I worked in an art library for two years. While he tried
unsuccessfully in graduate school and I didn’t know what I wanted to do at that time. But I
realized very within about 6 months that I loved doing research but I didn’t like doing research
so much for other people because they controlled the results and I had different ideas and I then
got a job for faculty member who was writing a book on the history of tobacco and I kept finding
all the facts about how awful tobacco was and didn’t understand that he was writing a book that
was supposed to be in praise of tobacco. So that solidified my decision I was going to go to
graduate school. And I applied in courses in history and medieval studies and in comp lit. And
only the history departments took me and so I had a choice between Wisconsin and Chicago and
I went to Wisconsin because my grandmother’s first cousins were there and Id heard about them
all my life and I wanted to meet them and it was a chance to be near family. And I had to be
admitted by particular faculty member in the history department he has never believed that I did
not come there for him. So again college was private graduate school was public. Am I giving you answers that are too long?

**ND:** No, this is perfect.

**KT:** Okay

**ND:** Okay so what brought you to the University of Iowa?

**KT:** Well I had taught other places first my first teaching well first of all I went and finished my dissertation in Copenhagen because Id been an odd student I was never granted fellowship money when I went to Wisconsin and I did get one semester of teacher experience on an NEH grant that my professor had gotten but mostly I could grade papers and that was it so I didn’t have any money to do a dissertation so I applied for fellowships abroad. And I met a director of an institute in Copenhagen so he helped me get a fellowship to Copenhagen so I lived there for two years. I had thought about moving to Europe because this was the tale end of the Vietnam war and I was very disappointed with the politics with my country and I discovered its not so easy to choose to leave all your family so I came back to defend my dissertation and because it was in medieval history my director had me do what medieval students did when they finished their exams was to throw a banquet for their professors and so one of them was a professor named Bob Kingden who use to be here at Iowa. And when he arrived I gotten good champagne and he had already had about two glasses when his secretary called to tell him one of his former students who is not in religion here Ray Mensor was on the phone and Ray was teaching at Montana State. And Ray said not only had he gotten the fellowship for a sabbatical that Bob Kingden had recommended him for but two other members of the department were going to be on leave so if Bob knew anyone who could teach there they would accept Ray’s decision as to who should replace him and Bob said I got a women who can do all three. So that’s how I got that job for a year and it was very rare for women to have official jobs at that point. But I had a wonderful year in Montana I had great colleagues it was a department of history full of philosophy and religion. And from there I got a 10 year tract job at Pomona college and that had wonderful students but I was not crazy about the Los Angeles area and I got a scholarship to go spend a year in Florence at a institute run by Harvard. So I went there to work on what would have to be my first book and my former dissertation director in Wisconsin heard about the job here and put my name in so I was invited to come interview and I really loved the department. Part of it was everybody who interviewed me talked to me about other peoples research nobody seemed egotistical. And another is the airlines lost my luggage while I was coming over and no body noticed I was wearing the same clothes for three days. And I thought all right I don’t have to be a fashionista here because I never liked or never was good at being fashionable. So that’s basically what attracted me here I didn’t get to really meat any undergraduates I meat the graduate students they seemed nice the colleagues all seemed interesting and I would have a chance to teach graduate students as well as undergraduates. Which I was interested in doing that.
KM: How has the university changed while you’ve been here?

[Redacted at Interviewee’s Request, See Page 12]

KM: Yeah that’s what we want.

KT: So when there is little faculty governance I mean faculty are not necessarily the wisest individuals but in groups you can get pretty good decisions. And faculty are pretty good at defending student interest not all of your interest but in terms of educational quality there is nothing we want more then for you to get the best possible education even if we all know from our own experience that college is not just about getting an education in our culture its about having a life.

ND: Alright could you tell us a little bit about your experiences in the history department here?

KT: Yeah it’s been a wonderful department in most respects. When I came here I was the third women ever hired well ill put it differently there had been other women before me but never more then two women so the two women were Linda Kerber and Sarah Hanley and they had probably been the only two women for roughly a decade when I came. And people seemed satisfied to have two women my mother had never had a choice of jobs the only place that ever took her was the place where my family had been influential in Louisville namely the University of Louisville and she was a feminist from the time Betty Friedan book came out she’d been a feminist before that but she didn’t have a name for it. And I was a feminist from the time I was 13 but I think I was the kind that wasn’t scary. I didn’t hate men for one thing I’m heterosexual. So I came but it seemed to me very important to keep the ladder down for women coming after me but I always also thought that the first priority in hiring someone is hiring somebody who can succeed at the position and so when I came I would say every man wanted to be considered a feminist by the women they weren’t all successfully feminist because they had been inculturated in a pre-feminist era but they certainly were not hostile to women I never experience any sexism of any significance on their part unlike Pomona college. They were tremendously supportive and because I had gotten divorced while in was in graduate school and had several years being single I was included in the life of the department from the beginning because almost all of my colleagues had grown children who moved away so there was not centering of the department life on families who had obligations to get home early because of children and all my colleagues invited me over within the first couple months. So every weekend I had a party to go to and people were friendly and interested and helpful from the very beginning and I got other job offers and job nibbles from the beginning and always had department chairs who would go to bat for trying to retain me which was very flattering and its what I think chairs and deans should always try to do with colleagues they want to keep. That’s another things that’s changed by the way deans don’t always see the wisdom of that and when I went to Pomona college they required me to turn down two very good fellowships when I arrived saying that nobody had ever done that when I arrived and found out two male colleagues and my predecessor had all taken fellowships the first years. So I was angry at Pomona college in a way from that day on I didn’t
realize it so my view is you don’t want to make colleagues ever leave here angry at the institution because they are the people who can help attract future students and future faculty. So my department was very good not only in both retaining me but trying to retain everybody. And there were several searches my first years here and I was put on the committees cause they needed a women on the committee to something my mothers generation had fought for so that women’s views were not excluded and I kept trying to find ways to make sure it was harder to throw women out of the pool then it was to throw men out that was so if it took two out of four people to say that a mans work was not interesting it would take three for example to throw out a women. And as a result we had many more women in the final pools and we started hiring more women and I think that I was on the search committee that hired two thirds of the next group of six women. I would say and now were up to 50 percent women. So it’s changed enormously in that way. Another way it’s changed is that a lot of people did start having children, and I think their social lives have revolved more around their children’s parents, which is pretty common in our culture. So i think the history department has a smaller social life than it did when I arrived, both because of the difference in age and culture, and also because a lot of the social life before me depended on the fact that men could assume their wives didn't have full time jobs and they could cook for the parties, and that’s no longer true. So, I think that’s happened everywhere now that communal social life in departments has diminished. I know most of my most junior colleagues think we’re not collegial, I don’t know if they have the same definition of collegial as I do. I had watched my mother take a lot of guff at the hands of her colleagues and I had seen it elsewhere, and I experienced it at Pomona College, so for me this has always been a wonderful department. I don’t think our deans, who are scientists, have fully appreciated the strength of our department. And so, we’ve had less success at having as many opportunities to hire as we need to have.

ND: So do you think the humanities are underrepresented at the university right now?

KT: Definitely. Since I was on the search committee that hired this dean, I saw the figures, and over the last 15 years or so, the humanities have lost far more tenure track positions than the other groups in the college, and that would mean social sciences, other sciences, and arts.

KM: I saw that you were one of only 26 members to be appointed to the national council on the humanities, correct? What do you hope to get accomplished while you are in this position?

KT: Well, it’s a council that advises the director of the national endowment for the humanities. So, I’m still learning what my job is there, but it seems to be principally being on committees that oversee the quality of the selection process for people who have applied for individual fellowships and various other kinds of grants; they’re grants to museums, they’re grants for people who are recording languages that are dying out, they’re digital humanities grants. There are lots of different kinds of programs. So on the council itself my role is pretty much constrained by that. What I’m excited about is that it gives me what Teddy Roosevelt called a Bully Pulpit. That is, it gives me an overview on what’s happening in the humanities in the United States. And what I really hope to do is to use that to help strengthen the humanities at
Iowa, and help make the case as to why we want to rebuild and strengthen the humanities. But
that’s still new, it’s hard for me to know if there’s more to it than that.

**KM:** Who was your favorite professor while you were in college? Or, who would you attribute
your success to? Those are different questions. My favorite professor was my Shakespeare
professor, but it was the letter from Marsha Kolish that delved me into intellectual history, who
helped me get into graduate school, and who gave me the first preparation for the kinds of work I
do now. But I didn’t know that at the time. And I took her course my very last semester, but
Shakespeare gave me a hobby for life, and it was a really wonderful course. And I also took
every music course that they would let a student take at the conservatory who didn’t have any
musical talent, so I actually had a professor there with whom I did private study on Mozart, and
sat in on a quartet class on Beethoven, where I claimed I would turn pages for the quartet;
quartets never need page turners. They were great teachers too. Marsha Kolish probably had the
longest term impact on my career.

**KM:** What is your favorite memory while you’ve been here at the university?

**KT:** Favorite memory, well I think it has been—well there’s been a lot, I met my husband here
so that has to be up there in the top ten. The first time I went to an opera here, my first semester
I think, it was certainly my first year was Boris Gutenhof. That was wonderful. Going into the art
building when it was...the Art Building West when it was first opened was very exciting. My first
several years here the history department was scattered among three buildings, so when we
finally got moved into Schaffer Hall after it was renovated was great.

**KM:** Do you have any childhood memories you would like to share?

**KT:** Well let’s see, I came from what was in essence a huge clan that had come over to the
United States as revolutionaries in 1848. And, I just remember doing. Well growing up it was
like growing up in a nest. There were always some of my relatives, and my great aunts and my
grandmother would play baseball with my 3 year old cousin, who was the backup pitcher, or the
backup catcher rather because he could barely stand up. So, I remember summers doing that, I
remember my grandfather teaching me how to ride a horse when I was very small. So my
memories are less interesting if I were to try and specify them but I would just say that I was
very much shaped by that family and its values, which I hope I’ve perpetuated.

**ND:** This is kind of unrelated to that subject, but tell us about your work here at the university
and what you’ve contributed to, journals, things like that I guess.

**KT:** You mean my research work?

**ND:** Yeah your research work.
KT: Well the advantage to having majored in Medieval Studies rather than in history is that it gave me the preparation to work in several related fields. So...and in graduate school I took a really crucial course my first semester, which was Latin Paleography, which teaches you how to read medieval manuscripts from different periods, so the fact that it is written in letters that are nearly unintelligible to most people is never a barrier to try to find out what is written in that manuscript. So, some of my research has been in the area that we might just call paleographic, and it has made possible my other research. Some of my work has been in the history of philosophy, particularly where it intersects with the history of science. And the book I’m working on now that I’ve given some papers on and published some stuff on is in art history. So all that I, the basis laid by my undergraduate major and then my graduate studies. So my research has been where theories on vision connect with theories on how we know the world. So, modern day people would study the theories of vision under psychology and neuroscience, and how we know the world would be studied in the philosophy departments and psychology, and all of this connects to the one science in the Middle Ages that was truly successful in 20th century terms, namely optics. And I got interested in the question of how it is that optics theories have become so central to Western philosophical thinking. So the people whose work I study mostly taught in European Universities, especially Oxford and Paris, but also Bologna and Toulouse and some other places. And they would not, they could have given you definitions of the differences between theology and science, but they wouldn’t have actually separated it in their own lives and in their own work. So, what I do is the intersection of things we now separate completely, and it’s given me a chance to travel. I go to medieval manuscript collections in different places in Europe. The manuscripts are all over, so there’s always a reason to go to a new place, and fortunately no manuscript collection is open twenty-four hours a day so it has given me a chance to be a tourist, and that has taught me a lot about different cultures, where I have been, so I integrate that into my teaching. I’ve lived a very, very fortunate life; I get paid to do what is mostly fun. I don’t like having to start writing, but once I’m writing I enjoy the capacity to do it and to discover things over the course of it.

ND: Where’s your favorite place you’ve been?


ND: What about Paris makes it special?

KT: I think I fell in love with Paris before I ever went there by a French reading I did the summer before, [French title], about the end of the German occupation in World War II, and I love the architecture, I love the food, It’s got this wonderful mix of the Haussmannian Boulevards that are so uniform in this brilliant golden-pink limestone, with so much medieval town there, I have French friends there, I like the way the French live their lives, I’ve always liked the language--I think I speak Spanish almost without an accent--I’m sure I have a heavy American accent in French, but the French now think that’s cute, the way that we’ve always thought French accents are cute. So I’m less embarrassed about the fact that I can’t speak it perfectly, and I just sort of know Paris in a way. I’ve certainly travelled other places I like a lot, I
like Rome a lot, we were just in Mexico, I liked Mexico, I found Japan fascinating when I travelled. I’m not sure I could be happy if I never saw Rome again, never see Florence again, but I could move to Paris and be happy. I would say one other thing that has changed about the university is when I arrived there were very few good restaurants, and there are now many more, so there is all the cultural life you could wish for in Iowa City, but the cost of living is low enough that you can afford to travel if you’re a professor. Can I ask you all why you’re majoring in history?

**ND:** Oh yeah sure, well I’m majoring in history because it was my favorite subject in high school and it was what I was good at, and my best teachers were history teachers, so they kind of inspired me to major in history.

**KM:** Yeah I’ve always just loved history, and I like to think about when researching that someone else has. like when I was going through the archives I enjoyed that this guy wrote on these papers thirty years ago, he was holding these, he was on a boat or something.

**KT:** The human touch.

**KM:** Yeah I just love that aspect of history

**KT:** That’s what’s fun about medieval manuscripts too, you know that somebody was 800 years ago writing with a real hand with real pen and ink.

**KM:** That’s what always fascinated me about history so I decided to pursue it.

**ND:** And how the technology changes, like isn’t that written on vellum, like it’s kind of crazy how they used leather to write on.

**KT:** Paper comes into use in the archives in manuscript collections I look at in about 1330; it was introduced into Spain by the Muslims by the 9th century, but most of what I look at is still on vellum. I’ve got a few sheets on the walls going upstairs. So what you can’t see here is the majority of our books. Every wall upstairs has books along it and in the basement. That’s another thing about being a history teacher, you have to love reading.

**KM:** Who is your favorite author?

**KT:** My favorite author. I don’t know if I could decide on a favorite ‘cause it changes. I guess Shakespeare, if I had nothing else Shakespeare would be good enough. At the moment I’m reading things by Alexander, what’s his name, McCauley-Smith or something, he’s fiction, and I want to read more by Olivia Manning who did the Balkan Trilogy. It just varies. How about you, who’s your favorite author?

**KM:** Favorite author. growing up, or high school age I always read all the Harry Potter books.
KT: Those are great, aren’t they?

KM: I don’t know if that’s a historical author and such but yeah Harry Potter, JK Rowling.

ND: I’d have to agree with that cause I read a lot of those you know? I like some of the older books; Catcher in the Rye is probably my favorite book.

KT: When I was in high school I read all of Jules Verne’s books, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea and so forth, and I really loved those but yeah Harry Potter I couldn’t put down, and I kept wondering why people think this is for kids and not for grownups.

ND: There’s some really adult themes, like ties to the rise of Nazism in Germany.

KT: Tolkien was that for me in college, I read the Lord of the Rings, and was taking an Old English course at the time and I realized I wanted to do Medieval Studies as a major.

KM: How have you noticed technology changing in both the way you teach and like you noticed how you grew up technology wise and how kids are doing now?

KT: There have been some huge changes. One is when I grew up, my mother had me when I was in seventh grade take half of a typing course from the YMCA because she wanted me to be able to type well enough that I would no longer ask her to type my term papers for school, and we had term papers from fifth grade on, but not so well that I would be tempted to do my boyfriend’s term papers as well as my own. So, I was never a great typist, but I can type without looking at the keys because I learned how to play piano and harpsichord, but your generation can type like nobody’s business. But as far as I can tell most of you have not learned how to write cursive, and part of what I study is medieval hands that nobody can study because nobody writes that way anymore, and I’m discovering that some students can’t read my cursive notes, so we’re gonna lose the ability to read everything that was written before about 1960, which as a medievalist there has been at least two other times in history where that’s happened, in the 6th century and 18th century. So, it’s scary to see that. On the other hand, computers make everything much easier in terms of writing. I would say a third of the nine months I spent writing my dissertation was taken up with retyping things, not just because the page had to look perfect when you turned it in but because I couldn’t always think past the sentence that wasn’t quite right, so computers take care of that if you do what I was always taught to do which is revise a lot. And Excel makes it possible for me to calculate data, which is something I’ve used mostly in trying to argue with the administration on behalf of the library, or on behalf of women’s salaries, and various other things. But, and PowerPoint. One way that art historians vary from historians is that for most historians images are just illustrations, whereas for art historians it’s the image of the object, the object is the real thing they study, but the image is what they work with. So before we had PowerPoint, art historians would spend hours at a slide table in the school of art and art history and if they didn’t have the image, they couldn’t teach that thing. So I started teaching a course on
the history of the book with an art historian back in the year 1999, I guess 1998, because that was the course I was teaching the day after 9/11, and I still had to use the slide table then, and it would take me four or five hours just to make sure I had the slides, and then I could decide what I could say about them. Well, I can now do that with PowerPoint for everything, and I don’t have to depend on just what the slide library has, I can go on the web, I can take photographs and put my own photographs in. Digital cameras mean that when I’m trying to read an inscription that’s in a building that’s thirty feet up I can’t read it I take a picture and then read it, and I can include that in things. So it has made it possible for me to integrate a lot more art into my teaching, and to try to teach history students how to see visually, and how to use visual information, ‘cause you are all more attuned to a visual world than my generation was. As far as I can tell, nobody teaches you how to analyze it, how to see how you’re being manipulated. So, that’s the big thing about technology I guess. And most of the new technology I’ve learned, I’ve learned from graduate students and honors undergraduates cause they’re the ones that spend enough time with me to see what it is that I’m not doing and what I can do. So how does your class plan to put this all together and make a history of the department?

**ND:** Well were compiling all of the transcripts and putting them on this website that a graduate student made for the floods of ’08, I forgot what the, what it was he was just talking about it today.

**KT:** Well, cut out the part I said about our current President and Board of Regents, that can be put in anything you put in writing, but I don’t want it to be publicly available. When I came, there were still a lot of battles to fight for a woman to have a career, but not nearly as many battles as my mother had to fight, so for me it was easy in comparison to her. I have a feeling that a lot of my younger women colleagues think all the battles have been won, and I don’t think that’s right, but I’d be curious to see if that’s the kind of thing you find out. Or if the men find that we’ve been doing this at the expense of men.

**KM:** What would you recommend someone do if they were to pursue a career like you?

**KT:** Like me? Well first thing you should do is do what I did and take a couple years out after college and work at a job, because I found it was much easier for me going to graduate school knowing what I did not want to do with my life. It made the hurdles much easier than I’d seen it be for those of my graduate students who have come straight from college. I think it really helped to do something else, because if you go to graduate school, you should really love it while you’re there. There was no guarantee there would be a job when I went through, and there’s still no guarantees. I would encourage people to do something other than American history if they want a job, because that’s what most people go into, so I would try something different if you could.

**KM:** Is that why you chose medieval?
KT: I wasn’t conscious of it but in retrospect I realize I was really lucky. I chose it because I like learning languages and I like Europe, and not because I thought Europe was the only important place, as a child I had wanted to go see and be an archaeologist in Yucatan, because I was interested in the Mayans, and I hated hot, damp summers, and I was told Yucatan was even worse. Well I was just there in the winter, and I kept saying the ruins were better than I had imagined, and I had made the right career choice not to be the one who digs them out. So, I think there are a lot of interesting places to go. But you said you like reading history for fun and I did to, and when I was thinking about graduate school my mother said well think about what you want to do for fun? What would you enjoy doing the most? So if you like reading about particular parts of the world and if you like traveling, then being a history professor is a good way to have a reason to be paid to do it. If you like high school kids better and you want to do for them what your teacher did for you its great too, it probably doesn’t require a PhD, and a graduate degree is more of an apprenticeship than an undergraduate degree, it doesn’t take lots of different courses, graduate degrees you can’t, or you’re expected not to, so its sort of narrowing. But really, you have to love the process of getting the degree, and not just thinking that you’re postponing enjoying your life.

ND: Is there anything else you want to say?

KT: I’m very glad you are doing this and I’m eager to see what you get.

End of Audio