

Interview with Dr. Maureen Andrews 4/9/96

INT: Dr. Andrews, how long have you worked at Northern Michigan University.

MA: Well, I taught for the first time in the fall of 1971 and I have taught part time and term(?) appointments until full time job started in the winter of 1976, so I have been full time since 1976.

INT: what do you see as the purpose of the English Department.

MA: I think it has two purposes, one it serves the greater university in teaching all students virtually how to write, and obviously that is the job of every department. In addition to it's service function it also has to provide courses in the disciplines for the people who are not major and minor English. so it really has two functions.

INT: Do you see one or the other as being more important?

MA: I think they are both important, I think that it is crucial to students to learn to organize their thoughts in some of the typical patterns ? in writing that our disciplines use and I think it is really essential for it and to write skillfully not just adequately, but skillfully. And it is not just for success in jobs but that this is important to learn and if your going to begin to think critically you have to be able to express the results of that thinking. I think that both of them are important, obviously I am in English because I love literature and didn't set out to teach people composition I set out to read as much as I could and this is what happened, and I still think those functions are very important.

INT: I understand you are the Checker advisor for the checker Sigma Phi Delta, how long have you been at that position.

MA: Since it was instituted in 1986. In fact I actually started it, by pulling together some majors at the time that I thought might be interested in the chapter and together were planned and started meeting in the spring of 1986 and were actually chartered that summer and we begin to function as a chapter in the fall of 1986.

INT: what is the purpose of Sigma Phi Delta?

MA: They have two purposes too. one of its purposes is simply to recognize the achievement of people who have majored in ?. This is an international society so every university has people who are high achievers and one way to recognize that is by providing an honor society. The other function is to allow those people to come together with other like minded people and to extend there understanding and involvement with the field by planning activities and with talking with each other, by getting in outside speakers,

name ? Browning the child belonged to the Dark Taller theme, that was the start.

INT: okay, is there anything you would like to add about the Dark Taller, Sigma Phi Delta or the English Department in general?

MA: I think that Sigma Phi Delta is an important function of our department. Obviously it fluctuates whenever you have a student group, it depends on the student at the time and you have a lot of turnover and then from what I noticed is that in general our students have less time for such things. We used to be able to get a normal or average meeting 14 or 15 for the meeting. And of course the terms of controversy, when we got into the satanic verses gift of the library we even had more attend, but generally there were about 14 or 15 people involved. Now it is hard to find a meeting time when people aren't working or when they don't have family responsibilities, it been harder now to make the group functional. I think it is still functions very well but with fewer people. And you just have to expect fluctuation in a group. With the population that changes so fast in our society because people can't even join it as Freshmen, most don't join until they are seniors because it depends on honor status and having completed a certain number courses. Though even there are problems, obviously to work around even in honor society, I think Sigma Phi Delta even in one of its weaker years, if we measured it in how many programs we put on, always does have a function, or some student, and in some years has a considerable function in the life of the English department. Some years we have presented as many as, I think a dozen of faculty colloquium for instance, I think that wouldn't of been presented if Sigma Phi Delta wouldn't of organized that and solicited papers. And certainly at the beginning of the Colloquium series it was very well attended by the English faculty that came to hear each other now that it is old hat, fewer come, many fewer come. But for awhile it was a vital ? for the department. Of course some of the members of the Sigma Phi Delta are faculty members. And when we have had social gatherings like the Robert Burns party or the Medieval literature party, or the picnic at Presque Isle in the fall many of those faculty members attend and the students have a chance to interact with them in a different role from the usual everyday classroom concept. So I think Sigma Phi Delta even though had bitter years and worse years has always had some function and often a very considerable function in the department. And I think the department recognizes that and they have been grateful for a lot of the Sigma Phi Delta, even just collecting the books when we moved our offices last year. It was a real service and it benefited the need and the department, because the books sale provided money for the trip to the national convention. so along with Sigma Phi Delta the Ada Phi chapter pacifically.

INT: Well thank you very much then, I appreciate your time.

Gwendelyn Brooks certainly qualifies in that area, but we have brought in other people as well. You can't always have the major well known figures because they are expensive. And it is also exciting to bring somebody in who is more at the beginning of the career and sort of give that person a boost and really rev them up ? ? . We brought in one of our own alumni, Sharon Dewery, English major, who won an important ? for short fiction. So we brought her here not only to read but also to spend two days workshopping with our students. That was very helpful. Those were the two kinds of programs that we work on, different ones different years different proportions.

INT: Sigma Phi Delta also publishes the Dark Talo, correct? or a chapter of it.

MA: Yes,

INT: what can you tell me about the Darka Taler or what is it.

MA: Well, the Dark Taler is an ? journal that our students started I think in 1990, I can't be sure, I think 1990 was the first issue. Before that Sigma Phi Delta members had been involved in couple of other publications one was called the Golden Fern and another was called AG, but it hadn't been a Sigma Phi Delta production as such, our members had been involved in it, but it wasn't really a product of our organization. The Dark Taler is however is, the editor is always a Sigma Phi Delta member and all of the editorial staff up until now has been, could change in the future. One year we didn't, after the Dark taller started we didn't publish because the Northwind, the student newspaper, was going to have a writing contest right around the same time that we normally solicit entries and they were offering cash prizes. So really didn't look like that was something we wanted to compete with since we didn't have cash prizes. That year Sigma Phi Delta members joined with the editorial staff of the Northwind and they jointly published something. which was really a special issue of the student newspaper. That had it's advantages in that you can publish more people and that cash prizes encourages more submission. The disadvantage is of course it is just printed on newsprint. That is not very durable and if someone is looking at this as the first publication it might be nice to have something that looks a little more permanent a little more polished. So after that year Sigma Phil Delta went back to the Dark Taler, and I don't think the Northwind went on with a literary competition.

INT: I haven't heard anything about it. Okay, do you know why, was there a purpose or a driving force behind the Dark Taller, was there one particular person?

MA: Yes there was one particular person, Greg Casperson had transferred here from Bay de Noc, and at there he worked on a student literary journal. He could not understand why our school didn't have a literary journal, and since he was willing to do the work, he came up with the name the Dark Taller, which is from that

and further to provide a public service which is to help people who may not be members of an organization to experience some of these things as well.

INT: What are the main activities or services of Sigma Phi Delta.

MA: Well Sigma Phi Delta tries to do two kinds of activities, some of them are just for members. Looking at the whole history of the group, some of them have been just party's. But party's designed to strengthened some of those aims that is if one of our aims is to strengthen our understanding of literature then so Christmas party organized around Robert Burns's writing is going to be both a effectification and learn more about Burns. So I remember that specific party very well. One of our students, Tim Clancy, who teaches English in Ishpeming now, got interested in Burns when he was in my British Survey class and he flutist with a group of musicians called the Caltones, he studied Burns on his own and studied his music as well on his own and finally composed an eulogy for the flute in the mode of music that Burns would of learned and studied. And he was very excited about that, and so he presented that in my survey class and then when he was a member of Sigma Phi Delta offered to do it again as the entertainment for our Christmas party. And by then it seemed he could do a lot of other things as well not only did he his music his original composition but also he played some of Burns pieces. We had someone from town come in sang Scottish Bells in a Scottish way. And we had readings of his, Burn's work by Arthur Pennel who is a retired member of our department. But Arthur grew up in an Scottish neighborhood so he actually knew the speech rhythms and accents perfectly. Hearing him read Burns opened up to a lot of people who had only heard me muddle through it or heard it in there heads. We had some Scottish food we had ?, we had short bread, lemon curd tarts and I can't remember what ever, but various typical Scottish treats. So that was a social activities. I think primarily helps when they bond together when they have experienced something like that and ? together in the program as well. But it also in some measures can add to our intellectual purposes which is to study literature ?. some of our programs are really not primarily social. I think in the process of planning for the program and doing all the work that needs to be done you know the budgeting, posters and all that sort of thing. There is always some social aspect, people come together and work, but the program itself is mainly to serve the ends of literature that is if we bring in a poet, do we are exposed to some new ? we might not know otherwise. We also hope that other people in the community will, university community and the greater community, will experience that. So we have brought in speakers such as Robert Boran, who read from his own work, we brought in a speaker Jeffery Ash, who is an expert on Authorian legend and he spoke to us on the search for the Holy ? and we had lets see a women came down from Michigan Tech. who talked about the way gender effects the way people read. So we tried to various kinds of programs. And more critical and more emphasis on the presenting creative writing. We have also brought major figures, Gwendelyn Brooks I think actually Robert ? was a major national figure, but