Annette J. Smith

ANNETTE J. SMITH
(b. 1924)

INTERVIEWED BY
HEIDI ASPATURIAN

December 10 and 11, 2010,
and January 10, 2011

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Subject area

French literature, English literature, translations, humanities, college art museums

Abstract

Interview in seven sessions, December 2010 to January 2011 with Annette J. Smith, visiting professor of French at Caltech from 1970 to 1982, appointed associate professor with tenure in 1982, promoted to professor of French in 1985, and Professor of Literature emeritus since 1993.

Family history, childhood and education in Algiers, Algeria. Family history and background of late husband, Caltech Professor of Literature David R. Smith (1960-1990). Bachelor's degree in Classics (1948) from Sorbonne in Paris. Attended the School of Professors of French Abroad at the Sorbonne and taught at the University of Wales in Swansea. Master's degree in English. Marriage to D. Smith and move to the United States.

Teaches at Scripps College and Claremont Men's College [now Claremont McKenna College], where she had tenure position. Caltech hires D. Smith as professor and A. Smith as lecturer in French language. D. Smith as Joseph Conrad scholar. Doctorate degree (1964) and dissertation on author Nicole Védrès. D. Smith made Master of Student Houses (1969-1975); life in Virginia Steele Scott house. Descriptions of faculty and atmosphere within Division of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), beginning when Hallett Smith was chair.

Friendship with Max and Manny Delbrück. Cultural life at Caltech; D. Smith brings poets, actors, directors and musicians to campus. Life as professor's spouse and efforts to improve working conditions and salaries for female staff. Sexual discrimination in HSS and support for Jenijoy La Belle. History and founding of Baxter Art Gallery (1970), significant exhibitions organized by D. Smith, closing of Baxter Art Gallery (1985). Important relationships with Caltech professors, postdocs and staff: R. Sperry, R. Feynman, A. Hibbs, J. and F. Audouze, D. and C. Cesarsky, J.-P. Bibring, and N. and C. Corngold.

Elevated to associate professor (1982). Literature courses she taught and impressions of students. Two books accepted for publication: one on Arthur de Gobineau and translation of poems by Aimé Césaire. Explanation of racial theories of Gobineau and discussion of his fiction; impact of Gobineau's racist writings and theories, including appropriation by Nazis. Discussion of Darwinism. Comments about translating poetry and working with poet Clayton Eshleman on four books of Césaire's poetry. Description of Césaire's life and politics and his importance as a leader and author. Reads her translations of Césaire's poems.

Impressions of foreign language study at Caltech and further descriptions of HSS, including some unfortunate hires and tension in the division. D. Smith's illness and death. Teaching in Papeete, Tahiti, 1990-1991. Circular nature of her life and work. Purchase of land and building of second home in Point Dume, Malibu, (1980-1981) and celebratory party there. Expressions of gratitude for Caltech and its brilliant scientists and community.

Administrative information

Access

The interview is unrestricted.

Preferred citation

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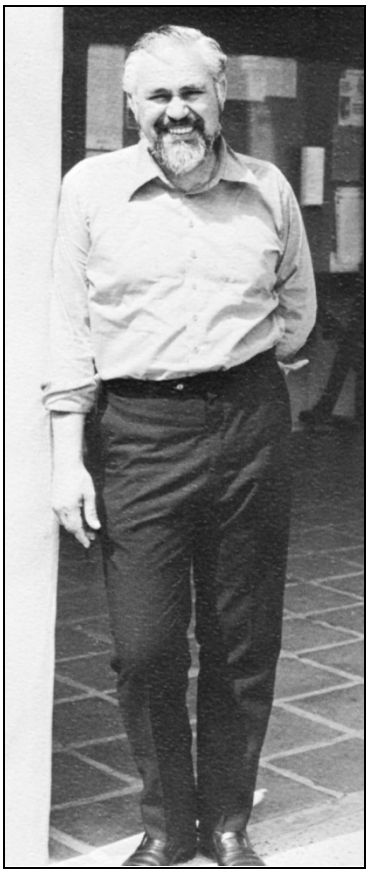

David R. Smith, 1971

In 1975, upon David Smith's retirement as Caltech's Master of Student Houses, the students' farewell gift to Dr. Smith was an Arabian Feast, complete with camels and belly dancers.

Appropriate to the occasion, the Smiths wore Berber garb.

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVES

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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BY HEIDI ASPATURIAN

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

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CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVES

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Annette J. Smith **by Heidi Aspaturian**

Caltech Athenaeum, Pasadena, California

Session 1	December 10, 2010
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Brentwood, California

Session 7	January 10, 2011

SESSION 1

December 10, 2010

ASPATURIAN: I generally start by asking about your family, your upbringing, and your educational background, so let's begin with that.

SMITH: Well, our family is very colorful, and when I say "our," I speak for my late husband, David, as well. [Professor of Literature David Smith, 1923–1990] David came from a well-known Norwegian family. His maternal great-great grandfather was a sea captain and brought back a young Javanese boy who eventually married a daughter of his, so there's a little Javanese streak in all of David's family. Their name was Prom. The son of the sea captain was a very famous actor who founded the Norwegian National Theater with [Henrik] Ibsen, [Edvard] Grieg and Ole Bull, a violinist. And there is a big avenue in Bergen, Norway, that is named after him. The son of the actor was an engineer by training, and when he studied in Munich, he lived with the Ibsens, so I have a couple of little notes from Ibsen. And that grandfather immigrated to

America and became a surveyor and then a banker in North Dakota. That's where David, my husband, was born—in Langdon, North Dakota.

ASPATURIAN: How about you?

SMITH: For me, of course the other end of the world. I was born in Algeria.

ASPATURIAN: What was your family name?

SMITH: Leblanc. I was born in an eighteenth century Arabian palace, which had seventy rooms, and they were very beautiful.

ASPATURIAN: How did you happen to be born in such a palatial place?

SMITH: Let me give you the long answer. My maternal great grandfather was a poor Spanish peasant who benefited from the fact that the French army was occupying Algeria. So he rowed to Algeria, making many trips in his small boat, bringing tobacco and various things like condoms, among other things. Eventually he stayed in Algiers—he brought his son—and started a tiny manufacture of tobacco near the harbor of Algiers and bought a shop for his son. Later they moved to Bal-el-Oued, a highly populated and very colorful suburb of Algiers, and established their factory there. Therefore the palatial home. He married his granddaughter—my grandmother—off to a Frenchman from Burgundy who became in his time one of the biggest tobacco manufacturers in France. This man took over the factory, modernized it with imported machines, and made it very big. He was a very well-known public figure, the first assistant to the mayor of Algiers, counselor for the external commerce of France and the consul of Bolivia. But he happened to have a young mistress, and in 1910, on February 10, as he was coming out of a very chic café in Algiers with his wife, son, and one daughter, the mistress came out from behind a bush and put five bullets into his head.

ASPATURIAN: A crime of passion.

SMITH: Yes, and he died instantly. In fact, that's when the phrase "a crime of passion" was coined for the French judiciary. And my family was so afraid of scandal that they applied pressure. There is nothing about it in the French-language press from that period. Nothing. They also put pressure on the lawyer, the public attorney, and so forth, so that those charges would be minimum. This woman did two years in prison and died toward the end or shortly after the end of her sentence. She probably gave birth to a child in prison, but it was never completely established. I also should add that fortunately for my family, because they were so afraid of scandal, the night before my grandfather was assassinated, the *Général Chanzy*—the regular ship between Algiers and Marseilles—sank off the coast of Minorca with 268 people lost, except for one sailor who swam ashore and took refuge in a cave and was found three days later, starving and crazy. And that diverted all the publicity from the murder case.

So all this is part of the family lore. I only heard it through my mother's memories and letters, and a cousin's memories. But about three or four months ago, I went online and put in the name of my grandfather into a search engine, and immediately pulled up a Madrid newspaper article that had the whole story on the front page. Half of the page was devoted to the assassination, with details I didn't know like the name of the murderer and what she said when she was arrested, which was, "I'm sorry I had to do it in front of his family, but I'm glad that I got that son of a bitch." The other half of the page was a story about the sinking of the *Général Chanzy* and the sailor who swam ashore. [Laughter] It was absolutely surreal.

On David's side, something interesting is that he had an uncle who fought in the Civil War and left a very moving memoir of his years in Andersonville Prison.

ASPATURIAN: He must have been on the Yankee side then, since Andersonville was a notorious Confederate prisoner-of-war camp.

SMITH: Yes, it was a notoriously cruel prison. He left a manuscript journal of it, which I gave to the [University of Indiana's] Lilly Library, along with my archives and those of my family.

ASPATURIAN: What was it like being part of the French community in Algiers?

SMITH: It was exactly like being in France because Algeria had the status of a French department, so it was like a French city. I grew up on the upper-middle-class side. However, in

Algeria and all of Northern Africa, there is a culture of physical beauty and activity that is classless. Probably if you read Camus, you remember it. And, you know, we partook of that as well.

ASPATURIAN: I was wondering because your background was clearly European, and I assume Christian, and you were surrounded by a Muslim North African population. How did that work?

SMITH: Yes, well, at that time the Muslims were under the control of the French. Very few of them actually made it to a Western education, for instance. But something special about my family—another long story—is that my father was a physician who had fought in Verdun during World War I, very gloriously; so heroically that he was photographed and featured in the *Illustration*, which was like *Life* magazine of that time. And he came back to Algiers and he took two *agrégations*—one in medicine and one in natural science.

ASPATURIAN: Two degrees, in other words?

SMITH: *Agrégations* are doctorates.

ASPATURIAN: Okay, so it would be the equivalent of our PhDs.

SMITH: Yes, probably a little higher. He became a member of the University of Algiers faculty, and he went on to become dean of the faculty of medicine and pharmacy for thirty years. And on the side, he was a physical anthropologist. He was very interested in other cultures by temperament, and he became a specialist on the Berbers.

ASPATURIAN: Ah, was this unusual in his day for a Frenchman?

SMITH: Yes. Well, it was not so unusual for a Frenchman to be interested in Islamic culture, but there were no other specialists of the Berbers in those days, and my father was part of several missions, including the first one to the Hoggar Mountains in southern Algeria, in the Sahara. He was the first to study and write about the Tuaregs—the guys in big black veils who ride camels. He wrote a lot about them, and he also later was sent on missions to the Fezzan and

Tripolitania—other parts of North Africa where the Berbers live. They are an older race who preceded the Arabs and were pushed back by them into mountainous regions. That's where they are, and they have kept their culture separated. They have a separate language. They're rather tepid Muslims. Their wives are very free and often very important in their community. It is, I'd say, quite a different culture. They have also been traditionally trodden upon by the Arabs. They were fantastic warriors so they fought fiercely for Algerian independence, but they were not rewarded for it. They were not particularly integrated into the new regime. They still complain about that and about the fact that they feel they are treated like second-class citizens. I have a lot of Berber friends who are writers and also a lot of bonds with Africa. I have a young friend who is a really great South African writer. I have kept my bonds with Africa. [More on African writers in Session 7. *–Ed.*]

ASPATURIAN: What was your education like in those days as a young girl, in elementary and secondary school?

SMITH: My elementary school was a little local school—very mixed—with Arab and Jewish kids. And then I went to one of the girls' high schools in Algiers. There were two them, both excellent. The French high-school system used to be fantastic. I studied a lot of Latin and Greek.

ASPATURIAN: So it was a rather classically based education?

SMITH: Yes, it separates at the end. The last year you choose between philosophy or mathematics.

ASPATURIAN: Basically the humanities or the sciences.

SMITH: Yes, and actually a little earlier you can choose between adding Greek or taking a second modern language. But it was an excellent, excellent education. I had thirteen years of Latin, and eleven of Greek.

ASPATURIAN: Were you a good student?

SMITH: Excellent, of course. [Laughter] My father was extremely demanding of me, but he also kept a constant intellectual dialogue with me. I owe him a lot. He had a fabulous library, and when I was punished I was locked in the library, and I could read anything. I read [Marquis de] Sade when I was eleven years old. [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: Did you have siblings?

SMITH: I have four siblings.

ASPATURIAN: What was your position in the family?

SMITH: I am the last one. Eleven years after the one before me.

ASPATURIAN: Really, so it was almost like being an only child?

SMITH: Yes, I *was* an only child.

ASPATURIAN: And your mother?

SMITH: My mother was a very childlike wife. She adored her husband, who was twenty years older than she was. But she never was too much of a mother. You know, she wasn't very involved with her children.

ASPATURIAN: More of a wife than a mother?

SMITH: Definitely. My parents also entertained a lot while I was growing up. And here is a childhood memory that may be interesting. I remember distinctly a party where Irène Joliot-Curie, you know, the daughter—

ASPATURIAN: Yes, Madame Curie's older daughter.

SMITH: Madame Curie's daughter—right—was among the guests. I wasn't part of the party; I was in the wings, but my parents and the maids talked about it later. She was a very cold and

reserved person, shy perhaps; and she went everywhere wearing sandals. She had probably assumed that Algiers was an exotic, tropical land. But it was very shocking to the Algerian bourgeoisie that she was wearing sandals everywhere, because they were extremely bourgeois, French and formal.

ASPATURIAN: Were there any particular cultural or religious influences on you as a child?

SMITH: Well, my family—I skipped a lot of my father's childhood, which is very interesting too. His father was, I guess, a mason, who became a supervisor and worked on the construction of Algeria's main dam—the largest one at the time, and for a long time after. For my father, as a young child, it was a very picturesque period of his life. He lived near these huge walls of rock or cement, with men hanging from them like monkeys from a tree or from a cliff. And the community of workers was very interesting as a microcosm of Algerian society. People like my father's father were very low down on that scale. A contingent of political prisoners at a camp nearby was also part of the workers. My father was very intrigued by how different this community of prisoners was from the other; that they were European, you know. They were French. They were not Arabs. So that's where he learned to read and write with the help of a very kind lady. That was the beginning of his intellectual life. His family was from France, and they were traditionally Catholic, like the Spanish side of the family. But my father, as a scientist, was agnostic. And so when I came, eleven years after the other children, they actually forgot to have me baptized.

But when I was eleven, I had my *crise de foi*—crisis of faith. It also means a liver disease [*crise de foie*]. [Laughter] I could see that my cousins were very devout—they were doing their first communion in beautiful white gowns, and so and so. And I wanted to become a Catholic; so I was trained by the local priest, who always said when he saw me, "Ha, ha. Here is the little girl of the man who thinks that man descends from the ape." [Laughter] Which was not true, because my father was too sophisticated a scientist to put it like that. Anyway, it was a short *crise*.

ASPATURIAN: But you got your white dress?

SMITH: No, but I got it all out of my system, and by the time I was eighteen I was agnostic like my father.

ASPATURIAN: So, correct me if I'm wrong. It sounds like it was a rather liberal, cosmopolitan, tolerant environment in which you grew up?

SMITH: You mean politically tolerant? Extremely, yes. In terms of upbringing, no. My parents were very, very strict. But apropos of tolerance, my second brother, Jean, had a very interesting career. A close friend of the family who was like a surrogate father to all of us was the greatest colonial historian of the twentieth century—Charles-André Julien. When Léon Blum was elected premier of France in 1936, it was to lead a Socialist government. Julien was head of a special commission directly under Blum's authority. He brought in my brother Jean. So my brother, although very young, was part of Léon Blum's entourage in Paris. Most of his career was in Morocco, but for several years before the war he lived in Paris. During the Vichy years, he was penalized for being in Blum's government, and he was sent to a little post that was way below his rank, in the Middle Atlas mountains in Morocco, between two Berber tribes—the Zaiane and the Zemmour. And we joined him there in early 1943, so we also lived among the Berbers. It was very beautiful.

ASPATURIAN: I wanted to ask you about your recollections of living in North Africa during World War II—the Vichy period and the Nazi occupation, and then during the Allied invasion, Operation Torch. What was all that like?

SMITH: Well, my father was an old man. By then he had actually retired, but he was called back to teach in Algiers because the professor who replaced him was young enough to be mobilized. And, at his age and having fought at Verdun and being a hero, he had a great respect for and faith in Marshal Pétain.

ASPATURIAN: Oh yes, the head of Vichy, who had been a hero in the First World War.

SMITH: So he was a sort of naïve Pétainist, and of course we did not know about the Shoah at all. You know, we were cut off from this news. So he was really naïve politically. But I think later he reproached himself for not knowing.

ASPATURIAN: Did any of your family go off to join the Free French forces under De Gaulle?

SMITH: No, most of my direct family was in Northern Africa. One in Morocco; one older brother was a prisoner of war in France; and my youngest brother, a test pilot, had been killed before the war, crashing his plane. So nobody was in the Resistance. Then in 1943, as I said, we went to Morocco in the Middle Atlas, and waited the war out there.

ASPATURIAN: So you were in North Africa this entire time?

SMITH: Yes.

ASPATURIAN: What prompted the move to Morocco?

SMITH: My father, as a retired man, did not want to stay in the city where he had once had power and prominence. He wanted to leave Algiers, so he joined my brother. You asked me about Operation Torch. While we were still in Algeria, we actually had a few bombs. I remember a bomb falling on the building next to ours. We had moved from the big house by then, and we rented an apartment in town. And I remember being in the staircase with my father the moment it fell. That was a very brief experience of being bombed.

ASPATURIAN: And after Operation Torch, I believe, Vichy was no longer in control of North Africa, so—

SMITH: Yes. And so my brother was rehabilitated and eventually ended his life as a plenipotentiary because he had played a discreet but important diplomatic role in the independence of Morocco and Tunisia. He was a distinguished Islamist and made all his career in Morocco. And this I think is interesting—his best friend was a scholar named Jacques Berque, who is a very famous Islamist. He was a professor at the Collège de France, which is

like the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study. It's an institute that's separate from the regular university's faculty, where only very great specialists in their field teach. Among other things, in 1991 he translated the *Koran*. His translation was really commented upon because he had redefined the word *jihad*—not as "war" but as "effort."

ASPATURIAN: After the war, at some point you must have decided you were going to go to France for your higher education. What were the circumstances?

SMITH: I wanted to continue of course—you know, in my family, my sister was a terrible student, but she had a wonderful, very carefree youth. As for me, I was the hope of my father. But since I was a woman, I couldn't go into sciences, so I was doomed to go into letters.

ASPATURIAN: But look where you ended up. [Laughter]

SMITH: So in 1945, at the end of the war, I left Morocco, actually traveling in trains and planes that were full of people who were back from concentration camps. It was very moving. I cried so much, from leaving my father. And on the train, there was a man who was out of Buchenwald or something like that, and who leaned toward me and said, "Look, that's not the way to cry. Today you cry a little bit. Tomorrow you cry a little bit. A little bit every day. That's better." [Laughter] Anyway, I'll never forget it. So I went to Paris, where my oldest brother lived. I lived in a students' dorm in Montparnasse, and I started at the Sorbonne.

ASPATURIAN: Was there a feeling among the Parisians that the French from North Africa were somehow different?

SMITH: No, not then. I mean, that came later, after the French were evacuated from Algeria in the fifties, and then there was a sort of a resentment that they were, you know, invading France, taking too much from it.

ASPATURIAN: So you started your undergraduate study in Paris.

SMITH: Yes. I took a BA in classics, which consists of four certificates—French, Latin, Greek, and Philology. And three of those—French, Latin, and Greek—include both literature and language.

ASPATURIAN: I'd like to back up for one moment. You must have discovered early on that you had a gift for languages.

SMITH: You think I have a gift for languages?

ASPATURIAN: Well, if you were taking Latin and Greek—

SMITH: Well, yes, I was a very good student, but I mean—my accent?

ASPATURIAN: There are good students, though, who are not good in languages.

SMITH: The only other accent in the [Caltech Humanities and Social Sciences] division—and it was much nicer than mine, actually—was [Professor of History] David Elliott's. I wouldn't say I'm gifted for language because I never lost my accent. But anyway, I was a good student.

ASPATURIAN: And you obviously liked language.

SMITH: Yes, I love philology, which includes the history of all the Romance languages and Latin and Greek. And I was good at it. But already I felt the pull to go farther away. For one thing my family was very interesting but very, uh, heavy, you know. So after receiving my bachelor's degree, I went to an institute in the Sorbonne called the School of Professors of French Abroad. And at the end there was a competition, which I passed with flying colors, and in fact I ranked first. I got a job in the area of Cultural Relations, and I went to the University of Wales, in Swansea, where I was an assistant something-or-other, teaching for two years.

ASPATURIAN: This was in 1948?

SMITH: Yes. And in Swansea, I learned English. [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: Another language.

SMITH: Yes, and I had a fantastic colleague there, the other Cultural Relations guy, Pierre Guiraud, who was maybe a little bit above me in rank. He became a great linguist and semiologist in France. He was a close friend of Roland Barthes. I had a wonderful education with him, just walking together through a very large park to get to the university. I learned a lot from him. He became very well known. At the time, he was working on [Paul] Valéry's poetics, a very innovative approach to poetry—with a slide rule!

ASPATURIAN: So you were learning English, and you were teaching. What were you teaching?

SMITH: I was teaching French conversation and a little language, things like that. It was an interesting experience. And at the end I decided to shift to English studies.

ASPATURIAN: What prompted that?

SMITH: Oh, I don't know. By then I could speak English, so I thought it would be easy. I thought that the next step would be an MA in English since I already had a BA in classics. But you know the MA has a big test in Anglo-Saxon, and I—[Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: *Beowulf*?

SMITH: *The Battle of Maldon*. [Laughter] Fortunately there was a very nice colleague, a young man who also sort of liked me, who went with me through *The Battle of Maldon*. So I went back to Paris, and I passed my MA with a very, very mediocre memoir on Jane Austen. I can't be proud of it. But I passed the Anglo-Saxon part. And it's after that that I guess I met my husband.

ASPATURIAN: What were the circumstances?

SMITH: In the summer, shortly after receiving my master's degree, I taught at the Alliance Française School to make pocket money.

ASPATURIAN: What type of school was the Alliance Française?

SMITH: It was a school for foreigners. They have one in Los Angeles as well. They're all over the world. They teach mostly language, and their teachers are very good. I was an amateur compared to their veteran teachers. Anyway, my husband was taking classes there but not in my class, I hasten to say. In the courtyard one day, he came to me, claimed we had met before, and we met. He had a little English motorcycle—a little BSA, a very small 125 cc or something like that, and it was green. So we called it *mon chou*, "my little cabbage." And shortly after meeting me, he left for a tour of Europe on his motorcycle. And I kept receiving postcards from everywhere and I was thinking, "Well, this guy looks serious." And indeed when he came home we became lovers; and then I waited for my parents to come back from wherever they were wintering to get formally engaged and married.

ASPATURIAN: Was he also a student at the time?

SMITH: He was in Europe on the GI bill to study languages toward a—at that point, actually**,** mythical—doctorate. But he was—you haven't seen pictures of David in the yearbook, perhaps?

ASPATURIAN: At an older age.

SMITH: He was so radiant physically. He had a fabulous smile, very blue eyes, dazzling white teeth, and sort of an exotic look about the eyes**—**you know, Javanese features, very slight, very subtle. And he was such a wonderful person. So, anyway, we got married. He then went to Morocco—he had never been there—because we wanted to make money before we'd go back together to the United States. And he got a job with a big engineering outfit—a conglomerate of American companies. It was a very small job. He supervised a team of five Moroccan Arabs because he could speak French.

At the time I was still in Paris. After I got my MA, I wanted a job, and before I left to join David in Morocco I was hired by the same institute at the Sorbonne where I had taken courses to become a professor abroad. I was an instructor of the first contingent of Fulbright students. And it was such an interesting group; they came from places like Sweet Briar, Bryn Mawr, Amherst, Middlebury. They were such mature students, and the job was wonderful. It

was very informal. I was supposed to have conversations with them and take them to the Paris monuments and acclimatize them to the French culture, and they were very bright. I remember three of them who were particularly remarkable. One was a young historian who founded the first public radio station in Berkeley. Another was a pianist who became world famous—Charles Rosen. He's old now, and he writes music critiques in the *New York Times*. And then there was a very gangly, extremely spastic young woman who was black, and who was the granddaughter of the people who had played the most prominent role in the Cicero riots in Chicago in 1951—huge riots in the suburbs of Chicago. They were a very interesting group.

And then I went to Morocco, and I got pregnant right away. It was a very primitive milieu, living with these construction people. We had a sort of a schizoid life, because my brother by then was governor of a large part of the south of Morocco. [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: So on the one hand, you had these very high connections, and on the other your husband was basically a construction-site supervisor.

SMITH: Yes. We'd spend the weekends in this dream of a palace near Agadir, and then the week with the construction crew. Because my brother was extremely liberal in training and outlook, he had become a friend of the king of Morocco, Mohammed the Fifth. At some point, Mohammed the Fifth was looking for a governess for the royal children, and he asked my brother to find one. And my brother's mother-in-law happened to be a teacher retired in Morocco, so she was recruited as the governess. And that's how I played several times with the king's son, who became King Hassan II, and his second son, whose name was [Moulay] Abdallah, and all the sisters, Lalla Aicha, Lalla Malika, Lalla Zohra, and so on. I don't remember all their names; four of them were teenagers and squabbled a lot.

ASPATURIAN: What was Hassan like as a young person?

SMITH: Very serious, a little bit like England's Prince William—you know, these children who realize that they're going to be kings can be very serious. But his brother Abdallah was just uncontrollable and so funny. I remember that in my brother's garden there was a slide, and he wouldn't go on the slide. And I said, "Why don't you go, Monseigneur?" Because of course you call them "monseigneur"—"your Highness." And he said, "I don't want to wear off the

bottom of my pants." [Laughter] But anyway, I went several times to the palace of the Sultan, to the harem, and met the mother of four of the children, who was the main wife.

ASPATURIAN: How did the harem members get along with one another?

SMITH: Very well, and not just in the Sultan's household, but in all the *Caïds*' [traditional designation for the North African ruling class. *–Ed.*] households as well—in Algeria too. Those men have several wives, and they all get along very well. Sometimes I was not sure which mothers the children were from. The sultan's last little girl, Lalla Zohra, was black, because she came from a harem favorite who was black.

ASPATURIAN: So in Morocco you had a baby. But then you came back to France?

SMITH: We went to America. But first we came through France to say goodbye to my family. David had bought an MG in England; and so in 1953 we crossed France, then America, in an MG with a six-month-old baby in the little compartment in the back.

ASPATURIAN: Did you fly to United States or did you take a boat?

SMITH: We took a boat from Europe to New York. And it was during one of the worst tempests in the North Atlantic. The captain said he had never seen anything like it. We arrived very late in the middle of the night in New York City. The customs officers were tired and in a bad mood, and the few belongings that we had brought from Morocco were badly packed in straw that came from poultry yards. The custom men flipped! So I sat on the trunk and I nursed the baby, and that pacified them.

ASPATURIAN: Once you got to America, where did you go?

SMITH: Once we were in New York—well, David had worked before with McGraw-Hill—

ASPATURIAN: The publisher.

SMITH: Yes. So when he knew he was going back to America, he tried to get a job in publishing. He sent his CV from Morocco, and what do you know, he got an interview with Alfred Knopf himself—the old man, Alfred! And Alfred gave him an absolutely fabulous job. Fabulous. He was to found and direct the new academic, university branch of Knopf. And it came with a lot of money—he signed a contract for a big salary—and an apartment in New York that they would help us to get. But first we went to California for a short vacation to see David's mother. And after two weeks there, David said, "I don't think I'm going back to the corporate world. I don't want to live in New York." So he resigned from Alfred Knopf, and he pumped gas for the next two years.

ASPATURIAN: A very interesting and impulsive act. How did you feel about that?

SMITH: In a way it's a trait—taking risks—that both David and I share, and it was very typical of him. Well, you know, it was a little hard on the "dean's daughter," but I am very adaptable.

ASPATURIAN: Did you like California?

SMITH: Well, not so much at the beginning.

ASPATURIAN: Was it Los Angeles?

SMITH: Yes, first we lived in North Hollywood for a few months. We were in a little apartment court where the women made fun of me because I couldn't drive, I had an accent, and I had big silverware pieces. And then we moved to Claremont because David was moved to another gas station near there, in Montclair, from which he managed to be fired, actually.

ASPATURIAN: Now did David have a PhD at this point?

SMITH: No, he had an MA.

ASPATURIAN: He had an MA. He was pumping gas in Montclair with his MA?

SMITH: Yes. And after he was fired he did other things like lead the Boy Scouts on the trail in San Dimas Park and bartend at night. And we got into a very iffy real estate operation, and we would have been totally wiped out except that a freeway happened to go over that piece of land, and that saved us from total bankruptcy. And then about eighteen months or so later, he went back for a teaching credential, and then he taught high school in Covina, then junior college in Fullerton, where he was not well looked upon because he was wearing a hounds tooth overcoat, an English cap, and using a cane since he had broken his ankle. And the president called him and said, "Tsk, tsk, too eccentric." That was suspect, you see. But in the junior college, he had some interesting students, including one who became our surrogate daughter. Do you know the poet Diane Wakoski?

ASPATURIAN: Yes.

SMITH: Well, she was like a surrogate daughter her whole life, and still is. She had a child out of wedlock during that college year. This was at Fullerton Junior College, although she was from Whittier. And we are still very, very close. She's part of my family.

ASPATURIAN: Where is she now?

SMITH: Near Ann Arbor, Michigan. In Lansing, yes, where she had a chair professorship. She's married to a very nice guy, Robert Turney, a talented photographer—after a very stormy life.

ASPATURIAN: So, you were a mom, your husband was teaching at Fullerton Junior College, but—

SMITH: But then he went for a doctorate. He got a Ford grant—

ASPATURIAN: A Ford Foundation Fellowship?

SMITH: Yes. So he took a doctorate—I must say "painfully." [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: Where did he take the doctorate?

SMITH: Claremont. He got a doctorate in American Lit. He worked on American fiction between 1812 and 1865. So, by the time he got his doctorate, I guess he had been an instructor for six months at Pomona College and didn't like it there at all. And I was pregnant for the third time, but I heard that there was a job at Scripps College for a teaching assistant in French. So I applied, and I got it. And I was teaching under the thumb of an abominable older woman, who had a vague BA, or something like that, and she was totally brutal and uncultured. But anyway, she had imposed herself on Scripps and impressed the president, so she was a full professor by then. And there I was, bursting, you know, with desire to write and to teach. And they had me teach twenty-three hours a week.

ASPATURIAN: That's quite a schedule.

SMITH: Yes. And I had three children by then. I was pregnant when I started at Scripps, and I practically had that third child in class. In any case, I want you to take a guess about my yearly salary.

ASPATURIAN: This was the early fifties?

SMITH: Yes.

ASPATURIAN: Twenty-seven hundred?

SMITH: Per year? Six hundred. So I protested very shyly about that. You know, I'm a timid person. And they gave me a raise. The second year I made eight hundred. But I was so desperate to teach—to have some kind of intellectual dialogue. Then into about my third or fourth year, Claremont Men's College [now Claremont McKenna] hired me. So I taught half time each at Scripps and Claremont. And Claremont Men's was wonderful to me; eventually, they took me full time. And they tenured me even though I didn't have a doctorate.

ASPATURIAN: You were teaching French literature, I assume, as well as the French language?

SMITH: At Claremont Men's, yes. Some literature, and also a lot of language. I was a very good teacher. I was very popular with the students. In those days, you know, I had the body of [Caltech Professor of Literature] Jenijoy La Belle, which did not hurt. [Laughter] In 1962 I also published my first article, in the *Claremont Quarterly*. It was called "The Mediterranean in the works of Albert Camus." And I was assaulted by a close friend of mine, Jacques Ehrmann, who became one of the young luminaries at Yale University and a leading specialist in structuralism, a prevalent trend then. He died very prematurely. But he was a leftist radical, and he attacked me over the fact that I had not interpreted the story of *The Fall* as Camus's *mea culpa* for his role in the Algerian war. My interpretation was different and happened to coincide later with that of Germaine Brée when she published a big book on Camus—she was a main Camus specialist in America for a long, long time—in which she agreed with me that in choosing such a hero Camus was actually mocking the critics who saw him like that.

ASPATURIAN: So you were a literary critic, a mother of three, the spouse of a professor, and a professor—or lecturer—yourself. And in 1964 you went back to France for the PhD. How did that come about?

SMITH: Well, by then David had his job at Caltech. He had been offered a job at Harvey Mudd and at Caltech. And we chose Caltech, which was the correct choice, because we thought that at Harvey Mudd—you know, in Claremont—we would be the big fish in a very small pond. At Caltech, we would be very small fish but in a very major pond. So we chose that.

ASPATURIAN: Did David come to Caltech as a tenured faculty member?

SMITH: No. He came as an instructor in 1958, and he was an instructor for two years. And in 1960 he was appointed assistant professor.

Well, in about 1964, I really missed scholarship. At the time we had a little beach house in Dana Point, and all the boys and David would surf all day long. I did not because I broke my ribs in an early try. David was fabricating—making—surfboards in the garage. He developed a line of surfboards, which he called the Zodiac line.

ASPATURIAN: A commercial line of surfboards?

SMITH: Not really. He mostly gave them to our sons' friends, and so on. They all had their Zodiac sign engraved somewhere. And in the middle of that house—it was very small and so noisy, full of those kids and surfers—I started working on my doctorate.

ASPATURIAN: And your thesis was on?

SMITH: My thesis was unusual in more than one way for the time. I wrote on Nicole Védrès, a contemporary French woman writer who had died shortly before I started that work. She was well known for wonderful essays, and also she wrote a lot of novels, which I used for my thesis but which were not so good. But she was very well known as a TV personality as well. She was like the Arianna Huffington of the time. She was also very beautiful; she looked like Marlene Dietrich. Anyway, she died, which authorized me legally to do a PhD on her.

ASPATURIAN: I'm interested that you chose a figure who was somewhat part of popular as well as literary culture. Was that an unusual choice in those days?

SMITH: Being trendy was not my motivation. My motivation was that, when I read her novels in particular, I felt that there was a very clear matriarchal subtext that came out in the way she wrote about society in her fiction. And I was struck by that, so that the thesis is actually on the matriarchal structures in literature. It was very comparative because I compared her work to a lot of others. It was a very big thesis, and I think it was one of the first academic works on that topic. Ten years later it would have been banal, but at the time there wasn't any work on that topic in literature. And she was very well known in the media, so that when I passed my thesis oral exams, I guess, in the little Sorbonne amphitheater, which is reserved for that, it's very cute—

ASPATURIAN: You defended your dissertation, as we'd say—

SMITH: Defended, yes, I was looking for the word. All the press came, and the photographers, and the next day there were articles in *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde.*

ASPATURIAN: How interesting. This must not have been terribly common.

SMITH: No, and the attention was not for me. She was so popular, you know, beloved—

ASPATURIAN: So was this the first work of formal scholarship on her?

SMITH: Yes, oh definitely, the first and probably the sole.

ASPATURIAN: So you picked a lively topic.

SMITH: And as for, you know, the matriarchal streak in her work—well, in reality it seems that the matriarchal societies have never existed—

ASPATURIAN: That's the current thinking, yes.

SMITH: There are matristic groups, or patrilocal, or matrilocal, but matriarchy itself is a myth. Well, in this matristic society of hers—you know the woman named Marija Gimbutas?

ASPATURIAN: No.

SMITH: She wrote a lot about the Mother Goddess. She's known all over the world by feminists.

ASPATURIAN: Is she an American?

SMITH: Well, originally she's a Lithuanian, but yes, she taught at UCLA. And she said that the matristic societies were characterized by being very democratic, tolerant, and socialistic, and commun—communal—

ASPATURIAN: Communitarian?

SMITH: Communitarian, and I saw these features in Védrès' writing. At some point, according to Gimbutas, the Kurgan—a people from the south of Russia—invaded the neighboring regions and imported a patriarchal society and the values of the warriors as opposed to those older matriarchal values. And it's interesting because, definitely, in everything I wrote, there is as well

a socialistic streak. And it connects with my brother Jean's career, and also with a remarkable fact that I skipped when you asked me about the history of my family: My great grandfather—the father of the tobacco manufacturer who was murdered—was a young socialist under Napoleon the Third. And in 1849 he was arrested and sent to a labor camp in the south of Algeria—Lambèse, a very famous prison—and spent more than twenty years there. In 1868, Napoleon the Third's regime was softening a little, and he offered a pardon to political prisoners. And this grandfather said, "I don't want to be liberated by a tyrant; I will wait for the Republic." So he did, and of course in 1871, after the Franco-Prussian War, there was the Third Republic, and then he was liberated.

So you see, in my family, there is a strong vein of socialism—

ASPATURIAN: And republicanism.

SMITH: Yes, and republicanism, so it's interesting that my thesis happened also to dwell on that idea.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, on those themes. So then you came to Caltech after you got your PhD?

SMITH: At the same time that I got my PhD. While David was at Caltech I continued to teach in Claremont for a number of years. But off and on, David and I would attend a party at the Hallett Smiths or the [Ned] Mungers—very glamorous hosts—so I met the division in that way; but I didn't know much about Caltech until in 1970, David was appointed Master of Student Houses (MOSH). So it was impossible for me to teach full-time at Claremont—there was no freeway then—and be in the Master's house with so much going on.

ASPATURIAN: So you moved to Pasadena?

SMITH: Yes: another suicide—you know we are specialists of suicide—I resigned from Claremont. They gave me a two-year's leave, which was nice, but I resigned from my tenured job, and I became a lecturer at Caltech, without many illusions about my academic career.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, not quite like your husband deciding to pump gas, but somewhat in the tradition—

SMITH: Fortunately, not quite that, but in the same mode. I left Claremont because there had been a lecturer in French at Caltech named Jim Greenlee, who left after he found a faculty position somewhere. So there was this slot for me.

ASPATURIAN: Were you the only language teacher at Caltech at that time?

SMITH: At that time, no. I don't know who taught the other languages, but in French, I had a young colleague. She was married at the time to [Professor of History] Robert Rosenstone. She taught the first year of French, and then I taught the second year—that's all the French there was. And she quit the job at Caltech to write a column for *Playboy*, where she dealt with serious questions like, "What is the number of calories in semen?" And there I was at Caltech teaching [Antoine de] Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, which I detested—

ASPATURIAN: Oh really. I've never liked that book either.

SMITH: I'm glad to finally find somebody who doesn't like it. Anyway, I thought she had lots of guts, and I'm sure she's still doing very well. She was a very beautiful and lively woman. The other person in French was a guy who had been totally ignored by the division. But he was a very distinguished philosopher named Alfred Stern, writing on existentialism in its early days. A very, very scholarly guy, but the division completely ignored him. He married a Puerto Rican, and they left for Puerto Rico when he retired. And last October, in Paris, a friend of mine came for dinner, bringing a Puerto Rican friend, and I mentioned Alfred Stern. And she said, "Oh, but he's very famous. There is a plaque on his house, which says "Alfred Stern lived here," and they made a little monument to his memory." I was so happy for him. [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: What were some of your initial impressions of the Humanities and Social Sciences [HSS] Division—the first people you met?

SMITH: Well, they were very hospitable. And, of course, Hallett Smith, the division chair, and his wife, Betty, entertained elegantly. Hallett had a great aura as a Shakespearean scholar and a great intellect. He was a very elegant man. Betty was very elegant too, in an eastern women's college kind of way. You know, it was the old Caltech: [Professor of Literature] Kent Clark, [Professor of Geography] Ned Munger, Hallett, [Professor of Literature] Beach Langston, David Elliott. I just knew them socially; I didn't know anything about the innards of Caltech.

ASPATURIAN: Was there any socializing with members of the science faculty?

SMITH: Yes, fortunately because it opened another door. The Fays gave wonderful parties—

ASPATURIAN: Peter Fay and his wife—

SMITH: Marietta. She's actually a co-owner of a French house with me. They had a hunting lodge in Sierra Madre—a huge room with two huge fireplaces. And they entertained scientists because Marietta was the daughter of Professor H. P. Robertson, you know, the very distinguished physicist. So, at their home you met her parents, you met a very young Murray Gell-Mann—

ASPATURIAN: Please, can you tell me about the very young Murray Gell-Mann [Millikan Professor of Physics, Emeritus, and 1969 Nobel laureate in Physics]?

SMITH: In those days, I didn't have an impression of Gell-Mann. Later I lived on the campus, and I knew him a little more. But do you want me to be completely candid?

ASPATURIAN: Oh, absolutely.

SMITH: He was very nice, but you know, so thorough. I mean if you would ask the least question or say, "Oh, that is a pretty vase," he would give you an hour lecture on Hopi vases. Very learned, and a nice man. But my closest friend on the campus was Max Delbrück [Caltech professor of biology; 1969 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine; 1906–1981]. We were very, very close, and he was so different from Gell-Mann. At the Fays, there were people like

that. Eventually, I had dinner there with Carl Sagan sitting next to me—you know, the billions and billions of stars. They sat him next to me because of a Sagan/Proust connection, but it turned out he didn't know anything about Proust, actually. Anyway, that's where I met the scientific part of Caltech, lots of them. Fred Zachariasen; very wonderful, Barclay Kamb. Oh, and Jesse Greenstein; he was the only scientist I had ever heard of before because he had had an article in the *Figaro*, in France.

ASPATURIAN: On what?

SMITH: On novae and supernovae, something like that. I had been fascinated by it so that in the fifties he was the only Caltech person I had heard about.

ASPATURIAN: Your husband's research at this time—was he now a Conrad scholar? Had this transition taken place?

SMITH: Let's see. Yes, he had already started to work on Conrad. He went to Philadelphia several times, to the Rosenbach Foundation, which has a lot of Conrad's manuscripts. And he published a beautiful edition of the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* David wrote a fine introduction, and it was illustrated by Henry Baskin, a very well-known American woodcut artist who gave us a portrait of Conrad, which I still have in my office. Also some time before, in the late fifties, David wrote an article on *Nostromo* called "The Three Sisters," and it was published in a major U.S. journal. And the greatest Americanist at the Sorbonne, whose name was Jean-Jacques Mayoux, was totally swept off his feet by it. He wrote David and told him it was the best thing he had ever read about Conrad and that he would love to meet David. We became very good friends with this guy. In 1966 David was promoted to associate professor.

But you know David was tempted by so many things. He was so versatile. He sailed; he was a fabulous sailor. So at some point we started having sailboats. First at Marina Del Rey, later at Ventura, and then at Long Beach. He could build boats, he could build surfboards, and he could build houses. And he could create an art gallery almost by himself. Very talented in all kinds of ways. He was not the kind of scholar who goes straightaway to research or a career.

Another thing about the 1960s. There was a professor of literature in the division—an older man called Harvey Eagleson, who was a gentleman scholar. He loved books, and he loved

to teach books, and he had absolutely devoted students. He had a course, a kind of book club, named "Beer and Pretzels."

ASPATURIAN: "Beer and Pretzels?"

SMITH: Yes, which he taught in his apartment and which ended with beer and pretzels, I guess. But the students who worked with him were totally inspired and remained very involved with literature, although they all became famous engineers and well-known scientists. One of the main ones was a chemical engineer who invented things like Nestea and some kind of condensed milk too. They became very rich but remained very attached to Caltech through the intellectual riches their lives had gained thanks to Harvey. Harvey singled David out as a possible successor and asked him to come and participate in some of these sessions. After Harvey died, David became the guru of this group, which had by then been enlarged by some people who were not necessarily Caltech alumni but of the same caliber. So David enjoyed doing that very much, and the meetings took place at different houses in turn and ended with dessert. And after he died in 1990, they asked me to become whatever you might want to call—

ASPATURIAN: The beer and pretzel guru?

SMITH: [Laughter] Yes, exactly. So I did that until 2003, and I enjoyed it very much because the reading list was quite varied. Everybody chose a book in turn, and sometimes they were recent books, not always novels, and sometimes they were rereading old classics like maybe *Moby Dick* or a Dickens or Balzac.

ASPATURIAN: Does it still exist?

SMITH: I just heard it had ceased a few years ago from Virginia Holt, the indomitable widow of one of those guys, who was actually a Stanford, not a Caltech, alumnus. She herself is very aged and weakened; but it's something very remarkable, I think, because it went on for such a long time, since the late 1930s, I would say.

**Some material in this session was originally recorded during Interview Session 7.*

ANNETTE J. SMITH

SESSION 2

December 11, 2010

ASPATURIAN: You were going to start by bringing us up to date on a few items from the first interview.

SMITH: That's right. One item I did not mention, but which is simply amusing, is that when I was teaching in Wales, in Swansea, one of my colleagues was Kingsley Amis, the novelist. It was his first job. He was a very strange young man with a lovely young wife and two kids, so that I actually baby-sat for Martin Amis.

ASPATURIAN: What do you remember about Kingsley and his family?

SMITH: Swansea was a very conservative and traditional institution intellectually, although their linguists were interested in the Berber dialects. I remember that. But Kingsley was so much the archetypical young poet, you know. He had longish hair. He gave a lecture on his poetry when he joined the faculty, and he read some poems. At the end some faculty member raised his hand and offered a very metaphysical interpretation of a poem, and Kingsley said, "No, no, it is just about my wife's menstruation." [Laughter] So he was iconoclastic. There's a beautiful peninsula near Swansea called the Gower, which is famous because of Dylan Thomas, and we used to take long walks on the Gower and picnic with my friend Pierre Guiraud, the linguist, whom I already mentioned.

ASPATURIAN: Do you remember anything about Martin Amis as a little kid?

SMITH: No, he was a baby. I think I only baby-sat once as a favor because they had to go out on short notice. So much for Kingsley. But I can tell you that I thoroughly detest the books of Martin Amis. I think he's a real jerk, and like many Britishers who were fed by America and were well-treated and welcome here, his lack of gratitude is so shocking. He can't find enough ways to deride America. And I don't find him a novelist of importance either!

Another thing I want to mention is that when I was teaching in Claremont I actually published two books, which were French-language textbooks for eighth graders. They used a method that had been worked out by a crazy Claremont faculty wife. She wanted to do twin books on Spanish and French. So she did the Spanish, and I did the French—I did two, actually. It was a constant struggle with her. She was jealous and paranoid, afraid that I would supplant her. The books were published by Ginn & Company, and they brought lots and lots of money to both of us, but the other author died long ago. She was so angry—her husband was part of the Scripps faculty, and they left Claremont in the middle of that, and she died not very long after. The books are now long out of print, and language books for kids are constantly being replaced by newer ones. But those did bring a lot of money for many years.

ASPATURIAN: So you had some nice royalties from this.

SMITH: Yes, very nice. Several thousand every year for an academic book; it's remarkable.

ASPATURIAN: What were they called again?

SMITH: There were two books. The first one was called *Nous Sommes Amis*—

ASPATURIAN: "We are friends."

SMITH: Yes, and the second one, *Comment Dit-on*? meaning, "How does one say—" And that brings back another memorable episode. I had a last rendezvous with a project editor at Ginn in Boston in the fall of 1962. And just before that, we were in Paris because in 1961–62 David had had a sabbatical, followed by a Fulbright. He taught at the universities of Lille and Toulouse and was somewhat amused by how old-fashioned the French system and the courses were, and so on. In some ways it was a very painful period because it was the peak of the struggle for Algerian independence. I was militantly in favor of independence, but my family was divided. One of my nephews went to jail for passing weapons and money to the Arab resistance, and things like that. The other part—the very bourgeois part—was very pro-OAS. OAS was a French terrorist organization that responded to the Arab terrorism. There were huge demonstrations in Paris that

I participated in. And some of my friends who were also leftists and supported independence had their apartment bombed.

So David finished that summer, and we were supposed to go back to America. Just a few days before leaving, I checked out my passport and other papers, and I noticed that my visa had expired. I was supposed to have had it renewed before. So with great self-assurance, I went to the American consulate, Place de la Concorde, and the staff employee said, "Your visa has expired. All you can do is apply for another visa." And I said with some self-importance, "That's impossible! I am a Fulbright wife. I have an appointment with my publisher in Boston in a few days." He said, "I'm very sorry, but you have to apply for another visa." I said, "Please call your boss." So a woman consul came, and I told her my story. And she said, "Well, if you are that learned, you ought to be able to read the fine print in your passport. And you have to apply for a new visa." The trouble is that the number of formalities for a new visa is large. And among all the papers, you need your judicial record. But all these papers—all my archival papers—were stored in Algiers; and in 1962, the government archives in Algiers were burning. There was no way to reach anyone and get any papers from them. So I waited and waited. My family left without me on the liner *France*. We had been looking forward to that voyage.

ASPATURIAN: So your husband and sons left.

SMITH: Yes, it was terrible. I did not know when I'd be reunited with them. In the ten days that followed, I think I must have lost thirty pounds. I was so, so anxious. Well I got so anxious that finally I did something that was amazing for a shy person like me. I went to the Ministry of Justice, which is on the Île de la Cité, and I worked my way to the door of the Minister of Justice, and I refused to leave. I lay down on the floor, across his door. And he arrived at about 1:00, or 1:30, surrounded by a bevy of officials and very busy because it happened to be the morning when they had tried to assassinate De Gaulle. That attempt became the film *Day of the Jackal*. And so the minister was very busy, which was a good thing for me. The usher said, "She refuses to go." And to get rid of me he said, "Take her to the chancellery." So they took me there, and under oath they delivered that paper to me, and I was done with it. I was gone within days of that. So what reminded me of that story is the fact that I told them, "I have an appointment with

my publisher in Boston." And I did fly to Boston, and then I flew to California; and since David and the children had taken a car—driving a car across America and visiting Indian sites—

ASPATURIAN: You got there first.

SMITH: I got there first.

ASPATURIAN: So you joined David at Caltech around 1970. By that time, was he tenured?

SMITH: Yes, when he became an associate professor of English literature.

ASPATURIAN: So why did David decide to become MOSH [Master of Student Houses]? What led him to that decision?

SMITH: Actually it was by default because they were going to offer the job to a scientist—a biologist—I forgot his name—who left and became provost of UC Santa Cruz [Robert Sinsheimer]. And I guess David was number two on the list. I think he was looking forward to it because, as I told you, he was very versatile. He loved to do very different things, and that was a chance to do something different.

ASPATURIAN: He sounds like quite an extroverted personality.

SMITH: Yes and no. This is something else I should mention—he'd been a hero of Iwo Jima during World War II. He was a young lieutenant in the Marines—about twenty-one years old—and at the head of a company that landed on Iwo Jima in the second wave of landings. His company was massacred under his eyes, and there were six people left, all grievously wounded, including him. He had a huge wound in his stomach—his abdomen. And they were lost—separated from the American lines—and wandered—

ASPATURIAN: In those jungles—

SMITH: Yes, and the Japanese were on the cliffs above, in caves, and were of course shooting at everyone. They had incredible adventures, like at some point climbing up a little monticule to see where they were. And the monticule started moving—it was a camouflaged Japanese tank. They jumped off, and there was a fight—a hand to hand fight. But anyway, at night David sent his sergeant, who was one of the six survivors and one of the few who could walk, to find the American lines, with the mission of bringing help. When the sergeant found them, he was so happy that he totally forgot to send help, so the following night—or that night I guess—David crawled on his back inside a tank truck because his abdomen was open and his guts were coming out. He crawled on his back all the way to the American lines and then sent help. I mention that apropos of his character because you said he was an extrovert. Yes, that was his appearance. He was a *bon vivant*, and his friends remember him as full of *joie de vivre*—his radiance, his dynamism, and so on. But he actually had been deeply marked by the war.

ASPATURIAN: By this experience—

SMITH: By this experience. He always thought he would die young because the fact that he hadn't died then was such a miracle that he was determined to enjoy every day from then on. And he was actually rather pessimistic on the world in general, and a stoic character. But that was his private side.

ASPATURIAN: It sounds like he had a rather existential outlook on things.

SMITH: Yes. To start with this pessimism—knowing that he would die young. That one time death had missed him, but it was waiting for him somehow. In fact he did die prematurely—somewhat prematurely and stoically. So that's the answer to your question about temperament.

ASPATURIAN: Yes. So let's look at the MOSH years. He took the job more or less by default, but you thought it was something that also appealed to him. So what was that like? Where did you live?

SMITH: Well, the first year that he was Master, the MOSH House was being restored—it was the Virginia Steele Scott house. She was part of a Pasadena family who had given Caltech a lot

of things, and she gave her own house. It's on Holliston—a very large mansion. It was not architecturally interesting, but it was very large and had a very nice garden. So I offered to redecorate it myself, with the help of a campus designer, and save Caltech money. And it was fun to go to wholesale fabric stores and choose beautiful fabrics for the drapes or to reupholster seats. I had inherited a great number of period French antiques from my family. So we brought those into the house, and we completed the refurnishing with what we found in the basements of Caltech. The result was smashing. And some of those furnishings are now actually in this [Athenaeum] hallway. [Laughter] But there was a beautiful thing—a terra-cotta group by [Jean-Antoine] Houdon, an eighteenth-century French sculptor. This painting, actually across from my [Athenaeum] room, was in the living room. But also in the living room was a huge painting of the school of [Nicolas] Poussin that was extremely beautiful. I wonder where it is by now.

Anyway, we moved into the house, and we were determined to make it elegant and have elegant living because having dined a number of times in the student houses, we felt that the students would benefit from a dining experience that was so different from that. [Laughter] So we were of course entertaining all the time, and every weekend we had one student house, complete, for a huge barbecue.

ASPATURIAN: You had the entire undergraduate student house?

SMITH: One house, yes. House by house, with the Resident Associates too, and sometimes some faculty. So there would be more than a hundred people. And the Caltech Physical Plant—that's one of my best memories of Caltech, the Physical Plant. They're so wonderful. They can do anything. They're very nice people. I love them. They built us a very large spit. So we would go to the central market and buy whole lambs, and we barbecued whole lambs every weekend on the spit. Students would come sometimes ahead of time to help turn the spit, and I served couscous and vegetables with it, and it was so much fun.

ASPATURIAN: You came to Caltech at a time of transition. Women were just starting to be admitted.

SMITH: David was involved in bringing undergraduate women to Caltech because, for one thing, he was part of the committee that decided to do it. He went to other institutions like

Princeton that had recently become coed to see how they worked out residence problems. There was a lot of debate about whether the women would live in separate facilities or in separate wings of the dorms or just anywhere in the dorms. I wasn't part of the debates, but I think they settled on having the women live in certain parts of the dorms. It didn't work perfectly. I mean, off and on, David had to iron out problems that had to do with coexistence.

ASPATURIAN: Such as?

SMITH: I don't remember. I just remember that it was not perfect. And actually the formula changed over the six years we were in the MOSH house. Eventually, there were at least some women who were living away from the dorms in a campus house.

ASPATURIAN: What do you remember about some of these students?

SMITH: I remember Louise Kirkbride [Caltech BS 1975; named a Caltech trustee in 1995]. She was in the freshman class of women.

ASPATURIAN: What year would that have been: 1971?

SMITH: I think 1971. The first class of women was only twelve, I think. Well, Louise Kirkbride had been interviewed by Caltech for admission, and David had been so impressed with her character and her intellect that he fought very hard to get her in because she had extremely difficult financial problems. Her family situation was very difficult. She was penniless, and I think the first year she worked at the Athenaeum as a waitress. But anyway, obviously this was a good recruit.

ASPATURIAN: Her family did not want her to go to Caltech?

SMITH: There was some kind of disagreement in her family. I don't remember the details. I also remember really very well Sharon Long [Caltech BS 1973; now Steere-Pfizer Professor of Biological Science at Stanford]—later McGee; she's now Chu. She remarried a professor, a biologist at Stanford, of Chinese origin. His name is [Gilbert] Chu. And she appears very

happy. But she married the first time in my house a mathematics major. And they lived in a campus house.

ASPATURIAN: That was Hal [Harold] McGee?

SMITH: No, another guy. They must have been only nineteen. So they married in the garden of the MOSH house, and about a year or two later, their marriage broke down. She had fallen in love with another student, Hal McGee [Caltech BS 1973]. So she came back to our house and spent a couple of months there in the guest room. And Hal of course would visit her there. It was a secret refuge. I don't remember where and exactly when they got married—I don't think it was in the Master's house. But anyway we always remained in touch.

There's a funny coincidence with Hal. I have of course his wonderful books on the biology and chemistry of cooking [*On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* and *The Curious Cook: More Kitchen Science and Lore*]. And for the second book—I think it was for the second one—he was working on the chemical formula for searing meat. And he found that the formula had been established or discovered by a professor at the faculty of medicine in Algiers. It turned out that it was the faculty of pharmacy. Anyway, he phoned me and said, "Do you know that guy?" And I said, "I remember the name." So he sent me a picture of the gowned faculty, assembled for some ceremony, and in the middle in the first row there was my father, of course, who was the dean. [Laughter] And I told him a little bit more about that professor of pharmacy, who was famous. I had an aunt who had been his student. His specialty was very racy jokes, and so she told them to me, and I forwarded them to Hal. He couldn't put them in his book. One of them was "Gentlemen! The semen contains such-and-such milligrams of nickel." I think it was nickel. "So why don't you get together and coin us some money?" And he was very misogynistic, according to my aunt.

Well, going back to the Master of Houses, the first year, before we could move into the house, I had the idea of asking various faculty if they would like to entertain the students at their home on the Master's budget, and many of them responded. So there were a number of parties at faculty homes. It was nice for me because I met many more faculty this way.

But David, as Master, was not always well understood. He didn't want to be a "papa" to the students. He thought they were young adults, and he treated them like that. And what he

thought he could bring to them was a complement to the science and the scientific world that they were deep into. So he developed the arts on the campus. Of course, part of that was the Baxter Art Gallery, but he also brought a lot of poets to hold readings. This necessity to expose the students to art happens to be an issue that Caltech never really resolved, although it comes back up periodically.

ASPATURIAN: Any poet in particular?

SMITH: There were so many, I can't remember them all—Diane Wakoski, of course, who was in residence here for a semester at least. Let's see: Galway Kinnell, Robert Peters, David Antin, Robert Creeley, Clayton Eshleman, Jerry [Jerome] Rothenberg; perhaps Robert Duncan. Many others undoubtedly. He also brought people in films, and then we entertained the directors and the students, and the actors. One of the interesting directors we met was Lina Wertmüller.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, Wertmuller, from *Swept Away [by an Unusual Destiny in the Blue Sea of August]* and *Seven Beauties*.

SMITH: A very forceful creature.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, so I've heard.

SMITH: But she came with a famed actor who was Giancarlo Giannini, who was so beautiful but so passive at her side.

ASPATURIAN: Interesting. Well, that's kind of the part he played in *Seven Beauties*. He's very passive in that film.

SMITH: I don't remember. Well, maybe I haven't seen the movie. Another thing David did when he was Master was recruiting the actor Larry Hagman.

ASPATURIAN: Recruiting him to do what?

SMITH: To teach in the students' houses. David felt the rather shy and awkward Caltech guys would benefit from a course in body language. So he recruited Larry Hagman to give "body expression" seminars to the students. Body language, which was perfect for Hagman because, you know, one day a week he didn't speak at all. It was part of his way of life, and he just gestured. And he was very, very funny. But anyway, we already had connections in Malibu, and we went there to meet him and recruit him. His wife, Maj, was a Swede, and she was very—a little bit—bossy, and she said that we had to go into the Jacuzzi and of course naked, because there was nothing to it. That's the way Swedes, I guess, do it. So I ended up in the Jacuzzi, in the nude, with Larry Hagman, Jack Nicholson, and Peter Fonda. All in a day's work!

ASPATURIAN: Nice group.

SMITH: Yes. Maj was passing cookies. David was surfing, taking advantage of the good surf on Malibu Beach, and I was in the Jacuzzi. Peter Fonda talked a lot. He was in the throes of his divorce. He was very worried about his daughter Bridget, who now, I guess, is an actress.

ASPATURIAN: I think so.

SMITH: And Nicholson was very quiet and sort of moody and disagreeable. The only thing he said to me was disagreeable. He asked me what it was like to live in a foreign language. I said, well, it was okay except that once in a while I wanted to finish a sentence and a native speaker would finish it before me, and that it was frustrating. He said with a sneer, "Ah yes, you want to compete wherever you are." David had Nina Foch come to teach also.

ASPATURIAN: Nina Foch was, I believe, a famous acting coach?

SMITH: She may have been. I don't remember that about her. But she was still an active actress, a rather snobbish lady, and also a very forceful personality. The first thing she used to tell anyone she met was that she was an aggressive woman, a strong woman, but not a castrating woman. I heard her say that at least three times. It seemed that it was something she had to establish right away. She had a little boy, a beautiful little boy, and a husband who was much younger than she was and so beautiful—a dancer.

ASPATURIAN: How long did they come for?

SMITH: Ah, I don't know. Maybe six months or a year.

ASPATURIAN: And what year would this have been roughly?

SMITH: That would be in 1973, 1974, I believe.

Anyway, during that same period—well, often in my life at Caltech, they sat me next to a guest of honor. I don't know why. Probably because they thought he or she would be amused by my accent or something like that. So around that time I had dinner at Lew Wasserman's house, sitting between Lew Wasserman [head of Universal Studios/MCA for many years and a member of the Caltech Board of Trustees –*Ed.*] and the film director Frank Capra. And Frank Capra, in my opinion, behaved like an abominable little man, arrogant and disagreeable in every way. I didn't talk to him very long because after a short exchange, I turned to my right and talked to Lew Wasserman. Capra is an alumnus of Caltech and very revered at Caltech, but as far as I am concerned he was not a nice person at all, although I love his movies. [Capra graduated from Throop University, the forerunner of Caltech, in 1918. –*Ed.*] Let's see, who came then to the Master's house? Sam Fuller—a very well-known director. And King Vidor, but he was very old and actually rather pitiful because he was trying to do abstract movies, and it was not successful. And then David brought a lot of musicians: Charles Lloyd, who was also a personal friend, started giving a series of evenings at Caltech with the students about jazz and jazz history. And talking about extra-curricular activities, the first year he was Master, David made wine with the students.

ASPATURIAN: And for those who were under age?

SMITH: Well, the underage did not drink it, or at least were not supposed to. But David found some vineyard—

ASPATURIAN: So, right down to the grape crushing?

SMITH: Right. They crushed the grapes under their feet, and they went through the whole process. And then he had the chemists work on aging the wine. They called it the Edgar Allen Poe Winery, so he had the literature people do research on Poe. And then he had students who could do graphics make labels for the bottles. The label showed Poe's actual cottage, but also the motto "never again" and a raven vomiting.

ASPATURIAN: It sounds like he worked very hard to bring a whole new cultural dimension to the lives of the students.

SMITH: Yes, he was trying to expand the students' culture because they were so narrowly focused.

ASPATURIAN: How successful was this? How did the students respond?

SMITH: Well, as far as I know he was a popular Master. When he retired from the job, they gave him a big party on the campus—an Arabian feast. If you have access to the 1975 yearbook [*The Big T*] you will see pictures in it. David and I both wore Berber garb, and David hired a belly dancer. I guess that was the beginning of the belly dancer tradition at Caltech, although [Beckman Professor of Chemistry] Harry Gray claims it was he who launched this tradition. And they had camels.

ASPATURIAN: They brought camels on campus?

SMITH: Yes, they had a couple of camels and David rode one. They had spread out beautiful rugs from the house or the Athenaeum, probably the students' houses, and the camels peed on them; and apart from that, it was a magnificent goodbye. You can see us in the yearbook. David and the students seemed to joke back and forth a lot. One of the jokes is the famous—I think it's called Dirty Dave Plaque. Toward the beginning of being MOSH, David stipulated that there would be no cars parked on the Olive Walk. He wanted to close the Olive Walk to cars. The students rebelled; and so he had a barrier of some kind put up. And of course the next day it was gone. And there was a plaque cemented into the ground to commemorate this, inscribed as "David R. Smith Memorial Ramp." This plaque became sort of iconic at Caltech, and it was

reinstalled in various places. And we lost track of it and would love it if someone knows where it is, would let us know, or give it back to us; we would love to have it as a memento. So that was one adventure. The Institute also provided us with a live-in maid. The first one was a young woman fresh from Hungary. She ended up actually marrying an engineer and staying in America. But one time, a student must have turned in a paper late or not turned it in, and David probably threatened him with some penalty. So this student came at night, and he stuck the paper to the front door with a fake rubber knife, you know, from a drugstore. [Laughter] And the Hungarian girl in the morning opened the door and fainted. She had seen all kinds of old Westerns and she felt that—

ASPATURIAN: Retribution was at hand.

SMITH: Yes, retribution.

ASPATURIAN: Your husband must have been very much on the front lines of Caltech's attempts to integrate women into the student body—and you were his spouse and also one of the few females on the faculty. Do you have recollections of that period with regard to women coming in and how it worked out?

SMITH: Well, the gist of your question is—you are asking me whether I was an active feminist in that period. And no, I was not an active feminist in the sense of burning my bra. But for a year in the late seventies, I joined a tiny group of women who wanted to do something concrete. We went to see the vice president of business and finance, David Morrisroe, who was hugely, massively, condescending. "Well," he said, "That's very nice. You can organize teas. You can have a little newsletter." So in that group there was a biology postdoc or doctoral candidate, and she and I were determined to really do something. We studied the campus population. We felt that although there were very few women on the faculty—either as lecturers or professors—those who were here were rather decently treated. But we did feel that the employees—the secretaries—were dreadfully treated. So we went to President Goldberger [Marvin "Murph" Goldberger, Caltech president, 1978–1987]—there were only four of us—and I made a very short speech. It must have been eloquent because that year the staff received the highest salary raise they had ever had in the history of Caltech. And either with it or perhaps later—because

that sort of encouraged them to fight for their benefits— they also got their dental coverage. We were very pleased with that, but we had sworn that we would serve one year on this committee, and that was it. So we quit. But it was very strange to notice at the time that many of the women were actually resentful of the work we had done for them, the agitation we had created. During that year, in the women's newsletter, we had published a number of little articles that were rather subversive.

ASPATURIAN: Did the OWC exist at this time—the Organization for Women at Caltech? Or would this be the start of it?

SMITH: Yes, that was the start of it. I remember that, at the beginning of the Goldberger presidency, Susan Davis [division administrator for the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences] and other people and I organized a women's event in which we did sort of a song-and-dance in front of the president. We presented a skit on the role of all the women at Caltech, which ended with our saying, "Have you seen the new vice president?" "No." "Oh, *she* is wonderful." That kind of thing. Anyway, I've never been a militant feminist, but you know, I have written at length about matriarchal features in literature. And especially in writing on [the poet] Aimé Césaire, I have drawn on the works of two French alpha feminists, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, who are very famous as social and literary critics. Luce Irigaray was a lesbian, and she actually was fired from the Sorbonne because of that. She was a disciple of [Jacques] Lacan. And Julia Kristeva continues to be very famous. I tried to get her at Caltech for one year. I had a long correspondence with her. I no longer have it, but eventually she said that she couldn't come because she had a young child in school, who was perhaps slightly handicapped—I'm not sure. But she was very concerned about the schooling problem, and so eventually she did not come to Caltech. But it's one of the few cases that I won in the faculty meetings—you know, everyone wanted her. She's a real famous figure.

Going back to the MOSH years, one thing I certainly remember from that time is cooking. I never used a caterer so I cooked for thousands and thousands of people. It was a marvelous kitchen in the Holliston house. Very pretty. And of course we had a live-in maid. That helps. And at one time there were quite a lot of French graduate students in engineering at Caltech. The French consulate keeps an eye on them, and actually the French military always

tries to have them spy on Caltech, believe it or not. So one time we had a French consul general for dinner with a group of students. But I had a radical lumbago and had to stay in bed. David cooked a wonderful *boeuf bourguignon,* and entertained without me. The consul was so taken with the whole thing that he sent *Better Homes and Gardens* to do an article on *my* cooking. So you know there's no justice in the world. And I was interviewed and photographed by *Better Homes and Gardens* for one day—queen for a day—

ASPATURIAN: What year was this, do you know?

SMITH: It was 1976. And it's a long article with many photos of me cooking and of the dishes that I cooked. I must say they were wonderful. One thing I learned from that operation is how they take photos of dishes with whipped cream. For this feature, I cooked two dinners: one that we ate with my guests and a parallel one to be photographed—and for that one, all the whipped cream was a sort of stuff that they spray and that doesn't melt, like cement.

During that period because we were the masters, we were invited often to the homes of other people. One was an academic couple, not from Caltech but living in Pasadena. And they really thought they were having for dinner the most famous Polish poet then-living, whose name was Zbigniew Herbert, and who was indeed a very, very major poet. He's dead now, but he and [Czeslaw] Milosz are the most famous contemporary writers in Poland. So that couple thought a long time about who would be the ideal match for the Herberts. And they invited David and me. It was just a small, six-people dinner. Before dinner I noticed that Zbigniew, who was a short stubby guy, drank a lot but his conversation was normal. And then we went on to dinner, and he drank more and more. And at some point in a very slurred voice, he said, "The Americans are very nice, but they don't understand anything about the war."

ASPATURIAN: You mean World War II?

SMITH: Yes. You know, David would never, never talk about his Iwo Jima experience and trauma. But he reared up to the occasion. He stood up, and he unbuttoned his shirt in front, and exposed his abdominal scar that went from here to there. And he said, "This is my war! This is my war!" And then he sat down.

ASPATURIAN: That must have stopped the conversation.

SMITH: Yes, there was a pause. And then Zbigniew got up, took down his trousers, showing huge welts, you know, on his behind, and started walking around the table showing his behind, saying, "This is my war! This is my war!" And then he sat down. And you know, the very genteel hosts were totally miffed—

ASPATURIAN: They didn't know what to do—

SMITH: They didn't know what to do. So there was silence. Finally the hostess said, "Well, let's go on to dessert." [Laughter] That went okay. And afterward, when we went to the living room, I was resolved to make peace, especially as in Polish the name Zbigniew means "peacemaker." So I said, "Come on, Peacemaker,"—or something like that—"we'll talk quietly in the living room." So we went to a huge coffee table with bowls of very rare seashells on it, and I pulled him down, and we sat on the rug in front of the table. And we started talking about Camus. And at some point it was clear that he disagreed with me about the attitudes of Camus during the Algerian war. I am more tolerant now, but at that time I had very strong feelings in support of Algerian independence. Then Zbigniew, in a very drunken voice, says, "The French are very nice, but they don't understand anything about literature." [Laughter] So I was fed up by then, you know. And I gave him sort of a friendly little cup, like that, on the cheek, and I got up. And then he got up, and he threw me into the fireplace.

ASPATURIAN: What? He picked you up, or he pushed you, into the fireplace?

SMITH: He pushed me, and very violently. Into the fireplace. There was no fire—

ASPATURIAN: How fortunate.

SMITH: Because it was in June. But like lightening, David got up, responding either to the boot camp instinct or the caveman instinct, I don't know; but he jumped on Zbigniew from the back, knocked him down on the rug, sat on him, and proceeded to punch him.

ASPATURIAN: Oh, my goodness. And this was supposed to be a dinner of cultured literary people.

SMITH: And we, the three women, pulled David off Zbigniew by his jacket. And Zbigniew staggered up with sort of a vague smile on his lips and tried to put back his coat. And his wife dragged him to the door, and they left. And I need to mention that when he got up, he knocked over the coffee table with all the rare seashells. So it was several days before I dared call that couple to thank them and apologize—

ASPATURIAN: To thank them for a lovely evening—

SMITH: And they were very cool, you know, chilly, I mean. They said that, well, they had not quite finished walking on crushed seashells on their rug and that it had plugged their vacuum cleaner. So that was a memorable occasion. But it's incredible—my life always goes in circles. After David's death, I met my present companion [Andrew Charwat] and his wife, Halina, and I became good friends of theirs. And they were very good friends of the Herberts and the Miloszes also because they all belonged to the same cultural milieu in Poland. And when I told Halina the story, she said, "It's funny that you mention that because I saw her [Mrs. Herbert] on the French television. She was interviewed, and she told that story as evidence of how Americans were uncivilized." [Laughter] And then, you know, Herbert and Halina died. And a few years later, what do you know? Zbigniew is dead, but Andrew is still friends with Herbert's wife, and he has become my companion.

ASPATURIAN: That is a circle.

SMITH: So, David and I also took the students sailing sometimes. I remember particularly one time when we had taken one student house—I forgot which one, Fleming perhaps—to Catalina. At that time we had a very little boat—a twenty-five-foot boat. We had to leave Catalina in a very, very strong Santa Ana wind of fifty to sixty miles per hour. We had a boat full of students, and one immediately was very sick, probably from the night before, whatever he had done. And he plugged the toilets, which is easy to do on a small boat; and we were in a terrible, terrible gale. I thought we would never make it. I was inside with three students, and protecting our

little dogs, and mopping the floor, where I'll say there was more than sea water. One student, whose name I forget, was very brave and helped David to hold the tiller because you needed a lot of strength in those conditions. We surfed all the way to Marina Del Rey at record speed.

We also sometime did a regatta with other sailors. And one of them, a regular, was Allan Acosta [Hayman Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Emeritus]. He was an expert diver and kept me supplied in sea urchins, which are my favorite seafood. We also sailed several times with a physicist, Jon Mathews, who was a devoted sailor. He and his wife, Jean, undertook a round-the-world trip and they invited us to go with them, at least as far as Hawaii. But we could not free ourselves right then, and so we did not go. And, you know that toward the end they disappeared.

ASPATURIAN: Where?

SMITH: In the Indian Ocean.

ASPATURIAN: Oh, yes, I remember reading about this.

SMITH: It was very tragic, but everybody says they ended the way they would have wanted to.

ASPATURIAN: Nobody knows to this day what became of them?

SMITH: No. People who were in touch with them got a couple of radio messages that were very worrisome, but there is no trace of them to this day. However, I remember David remarking that they had started this trip with the wrong boat. They took the boat that they used for trips to the Channel Islands [off the coast of Santa Barbara, California] and, you know, it surely cannot withstand the storms of the Indian Ocean.

ASPATURIAN: What else do you remember about the MOSH years?

SMITH: Of course, we experienced some of the famous student pranks. One was the Olive Walk plaque, which I've mentioned. Another one was a night where a student chemist had worked out the formula for the odor of household gas, and he injected it through the vents of the dorms. So

they evacuated all the dorms in the middle of the night; and the students came to the Master's house, and they slept everywhere on the rugs.

ASPATURIAN: What happened to the student?

SMITH: I don't know. You know Caltech is so very tolerant when the pranks are witty or technically interesting. Another thing that came out of the MOSH's life is that, as I was telling you, the first year, since we didn't have a Master's House, we asked various professors to entertain in their homes. And we called the Delbrücks.

ASPATURIAN: Had you known them at this point?

SMITH: Yes, we knew them from a dinner in Claremont, where it was just a six-people dinner. I didn't know anything about Max or his wife, Manny, at the time, but I was told by the host that this was a guy who was trying to apply quantum theory to biology. And Manny of course was always very animated, and she was an old friend of this host couple. Max was fairly quiet. But I remember that when we left, he got a coat out from the guest closet and presented it absent-mindedly to all three women there. Well anyway, in 1971, I think, or 1972, he got the Nobel.

ASPATURIAN: I believe it was 1969. He got it the same year as Murray Gell-Mann, which was 1969.

SMITH: Was it 1969?

ASPATURIAN: Yes, it was that early.

SMITH: Well, David must have already been Master then because I wrote to them the same letter I had sent other faculty, proposing that they hold a dinner for students. And they answered that they would love to co-organize camping trips instead of parties. And so a sort of legendary tradition of Joshua Tree camping started.

ASPATURIAN: I've heard about this—with the students and the Delbrücks—

SMITH: With the students and faculty, postdocs, the Delbrücks, the Smiths, and their families. And it was a wonderful, wonderful thing to do—you know, cooking on the open fire, etc.. In a way it was a gauge of our aging because the tradition was to do a second-day death march. It was all day long—terribly challenging and very, very rough. You've been to Joshua Tree?

ASPATURIAN: I have. It's very beautiful.

SMITH: Oh yes, but the hikes—very conducive to accidents. As the years went by, the young continued with the long walk, while the older ones contented themselves with a more modest walk. For our last expedition with the Delbrücks, when Max had already an advanced stage of cancer, we sailed him and Manny to Catalina and watched him climb the steep hill of Twin Harbors with incredible determination. That must have been his last hike. What a great and brave man he was!

**Some material in this session was originally recorded during Interview Session 7.*

ANNETTE J. SMITH

SESSION 3

December 11, 2010

SMITH: I was thinking about the mastership in general. When I read [Professor of Economics] Bob Oliver's oral history, it seemed, judging by what he says, that somehow the MOSH job lost some importance over the years and became less central to the life of the Institute. Even in David's time, especially at the beginning—the first one or two years or so—he felt that the position was not very well defined. There was a vice president for student affairs, and [Professor of Economics Robert] Huttenback had become dean of students. And you know, he hardly ever did anything discreetly. And there was on his part a kind of obvious desire to encroach upon the Master's position because after all he had been Master himself and a very popular and famous one for a long time.

ASPATURIAN: So did David take his place?

SMITH: Yes.

ASPATURIAN: Huttenback became dean, and David became MOSH?

SMITH: Yes. Huttenback stayed on the faculty as a professor, but became dean of students as well. I don't know how long he was dean of students but, for example, one of the things he used to do that irritated David was to settle at a table with an umbrella just outside the door of the Master's office and stop all the students, interviewing them and so on. David felt that it meant something.

Another thing I didn't mention about the Master's house is the organ, and indeed it was a feature that was shown at every party—

ASPATURIAN: The MOSH house had an organ?

SMITH: Yes, it had a real church organ, and there is a pipe room that's a curiosity. It goes deep into the ground and very high up, and the visit to the pipe room was sort of a routine feature of parties. David had the instrument assessed by a very good organist at the beginning of his tenure, and he said that all it was good for would be to play Elgar marches in the background of parties. Something else I didn't mention is that the MOSH house had a very classical French garden at the back with a pond in the middle and a beautiful life-size statue of Pomona at the end of it. We kept it like that with the beautiful symmetry—it was part of our desire to make an elegant house for the students, But the succeeding masters had very different ideas about what the Master's house was for, and one had a pool put in the garden, which destroyed the symmetry. And then a poolroom and billiard room were installed inside. So you know, *chacun à son goût.*

ASPATURIAN: Your sons were living with you in the MOSH house?

SMITH: Yes, two of them. The third one—the eldest—was already gone and had actually got married and moved to Austin, Texas, during that period. The two others attended Blair High School.

ASPATURIAN: Do you remember who the vice president for student affairs was at this time?

SMITH: Yes, it was a brother of a very good, very famous biologist—I can't remember their name now. His brother was a very reputed biologist at Caltech.

ASPATURIAN: Oh, Lyman Bonner? It must have been Dr. Bonner. There was James Bonner and Lyman Bonner.

SMITH: Yes, James Bonner was a very wonderful scientist. Lyman was more of an administrator. And actually, I'm not sure what he did as vice president of student affairs.

ASPATURIAN: I'd like to ask you about your early experiences here as a teacher—what you taught, what you remember about your students

SMITH: Well, my early experience: I took Jim Greenlee's place, and I taught second year French, and that's all probably.

ASPATURIAN: French as a foreign language?

SMITH: Yes, while that other faculty wife that I mentioned before taught first year French. And after she left, I probably also taught the first year, but at some point, probably in the 1970s when the division moved to Baxter, I was permitted to teach French literature.

ASPATURIAN: Had you requested it, or did they simply tell you?

SMITH: No, they didn't tell me, and I probably suggested it, but somehow it was approved. And I cannot tell you exactly how this process went, but over the years I taught more and more literature. Eventually they hired other people to teach the first year of French; I usually taught the second year. And then I taught, in turn, a series of literature courses. One was a survey course on the French novel, for which I picked several of my favorite novels. That means [François] Rabelais, [Madame de Lafayette's] *The Princess of Clèves*, [Choderlos de Laclos's] *Dangerous Liaisons,* Marquis de Sade's *Justine*, [Gustave] Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and—what did we end it with? [Émile] Zola's *Germinal*, and one contemporary one, André Pieyre de Mandiargues's *The Motorcycle*. Then I taught a course on classicism, which had Montaigne, Molière, Voltaire, and I don't remember who else.

ASPATURIAN: Was this taught in English or in French?

SMITH: In English. Literature in translation began just about then. There were not so many students to take them in the French language.

ASPATURIAN: So what was it like teaching French literature to very smart, but mostly science and engineering students?

SMITH: I'm going to tell you the same thing as Jenijoy [La Belle] probably told you. They were terrific students. They were well prepared, they took the course seriously, as if it were

important—you know, in my case, it was not really to them. They were bright. They were just terrific students. I must say that I handled the literature course in a very lax way. In the second year they had regular exams and so on, but in the Lit courses I never required written work.

ASPATURIAN: Oh my. So no essays?

SMITH: [Laughter] I graded them on their exposés, you know, oral exposés and participation in the class. And anyway, I never took their grades very seriously. I was very aware that this should be a pleasure for them, and I think I had them read very good books. I tried to teach them how to read, you know, to—

ASPATURIAN: Yes, how to relate to a piece of literature—

SMITH: Yes, how to approach a text. The perfect text to teach for a professor of literature who teaches modernism is the first paragraph of *Madame Bovary*. You've read it undoubtedly.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, in English.

SMITH: I taught it in English, in a very good translation. In the first paragraph, Charles Bovary is in class and, you know—

ASPATURIAN: Ah yes, they all made fun of him.

SMITH: Yes, they made fun of him—he was very out of place there. So they call his name and he answers, stands up, and that's when the whole class notices the extraordinary cap he's wearing. The paragraph is a description of the cap. You know, Flaubert had written many times, but especially to his mistress, Louise Colet, and to [Ivan] Turgenev, with whom he had an active correspondence, how he would like to write a book—here I am paraphrasing but almost quoting—without any plot, which would sustain itself by the very force of the language alone. So this paragraph is such a perfect application of that. In a way, Flaubert's project is a definition of modernism—the moment where the form becomes the content. The paragraph described the cap at length, and phonetically it is built in a sort of spiral so that it climbs with the description of

the most elaborate and incongruous ornaments, and then at some point it ends very abruptly and falls back.

ASPATURIAN: So it captures the geometry of the object.

SMITH: Yes, exactly, and besides being a verbal simulacrum of the object, it sums up the whole book: the ambitions of Charles, who never succeeded in anything, his mother's pretensions to elegance, and the tragic story of Madame Bovary herself, who had ambitions and dreams, and they all came to naught. So that to me was the best possible demonstration of Modernism. That's the kind of thing I did with the students that was very exciting.

ASPATURIAN: How did they respond to this?

SMITH: Well, they're not writing me twenty years later, or thirty or forty years later, to tell me they remember that. How can I know, but maybe in a little corner of their lives they remember reading *Madame Bovary*, in any case.

In second year French literature, we also read shorter texts, and I remember that there were two Greek brothers in the class. One was an undergraduate, and he was very passive and quiet. His brother was a doctoral candidate in physics and very bright; he went straight from there to Bell Labs. So I was teaching [Eugène] Ionesco: *The Lesson*.

ASPATURIAN: Oh yes. It ends with a lot of knives, I think.

SMITH: Yes, and it's a ferocious satire of education. And it is written so that in the end the student seems to be raped by the professor, whose presence increases, takes more and more volume, and becomes more and more noisy, and so on.

ASPATURIAN: I think I read that in French in college too.

SMITH: Yes, it's sort of a classic. But anyway, we were discussing in class that education can be a metaphor for rape, and how it was handled by Ionesco. And the elder Greek student came to me after class and said, "You know, I can't see any of that. I don't know how you can distort

the text in this direction." And I said, "Look, if we go to the library, and if I find six books that say the same thing, will you believe me?" And I had actually not read these books, but we went to the library and found six books on Ionesco—on contemporary theater—and all of them, of course, read *La Leçon* as a metaphor of rape. So he was astonished. What he didn't understand, being a scientific type, is how literary people could—how do you say—deduce all of that from words.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, just as an aside, I've run into this over the years at Caltech and now I'm starting to run into it with my own daughter also. There's kind of a "Well, how can you quantify this?" Well, you can't quantify it. It's literature.

SMITH: Yes, exactly. But it was not a frequent reaction. Perhaps some of the other students felt the same way but didn't express it. I remember this one case because the student came and challenged me. I also had one course on the modern novel with Sartre, Camus—not *The Stranger* because everybody has read it in school. We usually read *The Fall,* which is a much more complex book—well, so is *The Stranger* for that matter. We also read Claude Simon—one of the first new novelists—and also [Alain] Robbe-Grillet—

ASPATURIAN: I remember reading Robbe-Grillet in college—a very interesting novelist.

SMITH: Yes, *La Jalousie*—

ASPATURIAN: Yes, that was the one.

SMITH: Very interesting—actually very complex when you go into the theory of the New Novel. And Robbe-Grillet later wrote a play, *Project for a Revolution in New York*, which we read in second-year French, which is a satire of himself. He collected all the interpretive things that critics said about him, and then he put it together in a funny absurdist play. And I eventually taught—this was in the eighties—a course on literature and science. We had Descartes and mechanism and the theory of passions. Molière and the theory of humors—you know, moods. And what were the others? Voltaire, Diderot—on anti-mechanistic organicism. And the last one was Zola, about theories of heredity.

ASPATURIAN: So it sounds like you had quite an eclectic curriculum.

SMITH: Yes, one is very free at Caltech, which is a wonderful thing. I could never have done that in a junior college or in a state university, or perhaps, if I had been teaching a part of the basic required curriculum.

ASPATURIAN: No, probably not. Was Hallett Smith still the division chair at this time?

SMITH: No, Huttenback came up in 1972. But around 1970, somehow, there was a growing sense of malaise, of which David was a component because he had sat on an Institute committee to review a number of things. And one of the things the committee did was to limit the division chairmanships to ten years. And Hallett had served forever, brilliantly. Of course he was a fabulous scholar, a very distinguished mind and man. But the unfortunate thing—and this was typical of the Humanities Division during his time, I must say—is that things were rather incestuous. So his secretary, Virginia Kotkin, was also taking the minutes for this committee work. And she took these minutes, and she put them on Hallett's desk. And Hallett was very resentful that David had participated in this decision, and he was a little hostile to David from then on. At first he thought David should never accept the Master's appointment. Then at some point, at a faculty dinner, Hallett told me across the table, very loudly, that they were short of office space in Baxter, and he said, "Well, in any case, we should recoup David Smith's office because he's never there." And you know, in those days, David was teaching, he was MOSH, and he was director of the Baxter Art Gallery. And I really thought he was doing plenty. Perhaps he was less often in his Baxter office than before, because he was in the Master's office or in the gallery, but he certainly didn't deserve to be punished by having his office taken away from him. So I thought that was out of line. And in a general way, Hallett was a little embittered by not continuing as chairman and then, of course, he didn't like Huttenback at all.

ASPATURIAN: No. Before we go farther, I have a note here. While doing some background research on you I found a comment from Sharon Long, who said that your course in world literature opened up a whole new world for her.

SMITH: Oh really? I didn't know about that. I am deeply touched.

ASPATURIAN: I wondered what course—was she was referring to a course in French literature, or did you teach a course in world literature as well?

SMITH: Well, I did teach at some point a course on women's literature, you know, all around. And it was organized by [Professor of History] John Benton. And we were teaching Margery Kempe—you know, this holy woman—

ASPATURIAN: Yes, some sort of religious mystic—

SMITH: Yes, who managed to have eleven children nonetheless. And I know that the last one was a work by Proust: *Un Amour de Swann*. *Swann's Love.* I don't really remember what there was in the middle. But I don't think Sharon was talking about that because she was gone by then.

ASPATURIAN: She may have meant French literature.

SMITH: That was so sweet of her.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, that was a lovely comment. It sounds like she has wonderful memories of your classes. So in the early seventies there was something of a shift in the division's emphasis toward the social sciences.

SMITH: Yes. But I was not on the faculty in the early seventies. I heard echoes of it, but I was not like Jenijoy and Bob Oliver in the midst of the battle.

ASPATURIAN: You weren't in the eye of the storm—

SMITH: No, I was not in the eye of the storm. But a change of style with Huttenback—from Hallett Smith to Huttenback—was like going from the court of a Valois king that has its private intrigues and flaws to an England-educated Banana Republic president. Something like that. I should say that Huttenback was very kind to me always. I have no private grief with him. He was warm and enormously energetic and very funny—somewhat of a ham. But he was

dictatorial. And he's the one who started the shift of the division toward social sciences. But as I said, I was only an observer.

ASPATURIAN: During Jenijoy La Belle's tenure dispute, did you and David have any sense of it, and what were your feelings about it?

SMITH: Oh yes, we were very indignant. You know, even as an outsider, I distinctly remember the climate in the [HSS] division during that period. And it seems that everyone—even those out of the literature group—was completely infatuated with Harold Bloom. You heard his name all the time. And Stuart Ende, the literature professor who was up for tenure at the same time as Jenijoy, had been his student. I actually knew other students of his like Harold McGee—Sharon Long's now ex-husband. I don't think Harold Bloom did them much good, but anyway. Yes, it's very, very odd that Bloom had such influence on a case that he was not familiar with at all. And—these remarks are also inspired by my reading Jenijoy's oral history. In one place she says she regretted that Oscar Mandel had been a somewhat insufficient champion for her case in the committee, and that she thinks David Smith, for one, would have fought better. It is true David was more of a fighter than Oscar. But I think it does not matter who from literature would have been on that committee. The literature voice would have been overweighed in any case by the social scientists because Huttenback had already made up his mind. I was amazed, reading Jenijoy's oral history, at the number of committees that were called into action—

ASPATURIAN: Over this issue—

SMITH: Yes. Over-committees, oversight committees, new committees, ad-hoc committees, and it was just an exercise to preserve the forms. It meant nothing. We saw a lot of Jenijoy after she'd been rooted out of Caltech, and she was ever so dignified and so discreet also. We saw her when she had taken a job somewhere else and moved out of Pasadena. And well, you know the story itself, and I don't have a great deal to add to this picture. But what I can say is that people who were on the other side—some of them my good friends like Dan Kevles, who remain my very good friends——and who believed that there was no sexual component to this, were completely wrong. And I had a proof for that, which is that, one day on a Saturday or Sunday, I was in Baxter [Baxter Hall of Social Sciences and] picking up my mail upstairs. There was

nobody else there but Huttenback and a young Turk— a young professor of economics, I guess, who is now of course a famous full professor somewhere, perhaps even retired. They were in the office that Jenijoy was going to have and next to it was the men's toilet. And they were talking about playing a joke. The goal was to make the situation as uncomfortable—more than uncomfortable, offensive—for Jenijoy as possible. And I will not—I remember exactly what they were doing, but it is so crude that I will not tell you. But I mean this was so school-boyish—immature schoolboys intent upon offending a girl who was very bright, pretty, and was holding the line and not giving—

ASPATURIAN: I know exactly what you mean.

SMITH: And I know that there was a sexual component that was there. And I knew it later as well, but that's another chapter of my life.

ASPATURIAN: Well, now, we're in the mid-seventies, which I believe is when your husband became involved in establishing the Baxter Art Gallery. Is that right? Should we talk about that now?

SMITH: Yes, if you wish. You know, it was part of David's general desire to enrich the life of the campus. So in 1969 or 1970, he and Kent Clark went to seek out funds from the Mellon Foundation or a part of it that was known then as the Old Dominion Foundation. They came back with money, which permitted them to bring poets and artists to Caltech and to open an art workshop.

ASPATURIAN: Did they have to get permission from the administration to do this? Or were they able to just go seek out a funding source and then say, we have established a gallery.

SMITH: I think they had permission from the chairman of the [HSS] division, who was Huttenback. Beyond that, I don't know how Huttenback was involved.

ASPATURIAN: It's interesting because in his oral history, he takes credit for founding the Baxter Art Gallery.

SMITH: He does?

ASPATURIAN: Yes. He says—to Shirley Cohen— "Well, you know, I really was responsible for that," so I wondered. [From the *Huttenback Oral History*: "I started the museum, and I appointed David the director." *–Ed.*]

SMITH: Well, that is true, and he was dynamic in everything he did. They started modestly, in Dabney Lounge. They opened this art shop under the guidance of a rather crazy South African artist called Lukas van Vuuren, who was in charge of sculpture installation. It worked out, but on the other hand it became apparent that it was mostly faculty wives who used it rather than students. Then they wanted to have other shows, and they were *quite* successful. You know, there were a lot of people from Pasadena who came. So when Baxter opened, they decided to establish the art gallery in the basement and to have the space there. The first exhibit was of Jack Zajac and his wife, who were sculptors. Very fine, traditional work.

ASPATURIAN: When would this have been?

SMITH: 1971. I guess Kent Clark and Robert Rosenstone did not have the same passion as David to keep this gallery going, so they sort of disappeared, more or less, and David became the sole—not curator officially at the beginning, but he did everything. He swept the floor. He moved the partitions. He painted the rooms, changed the bulbs, and so on. And the gallery was so successful. Because it was a university gallery, it couldn't be commercial. That left David a great freedom. So he focused on contemporary art, but he also extended the range of exhibits. He exhibited very big names, some friends—Robert Irwin, Robert Alexander, most painters who were in the art news then. Ed Kienholz, who was in installation art, kinetic art. Even Calder.

ASPATURIAN: Alexander Calder!

SMITH: Yes. I had lunch with Calder and his wife, in fact. Very big names. For some people, David launched their careers.

ASPATURIAN: Can you give an example or two?

SMITH: Well, one is a Japanese artist named Masami Teraoka, who does very satirical things in the Japanese style. One of his most famous works is a painting of a woman juggling with fries, which he did for the opening of McDonald's in Japan. Anyway, he is very famous. David also launched the career of a young woman who has become very well known, but I couldn't remember her name.

ASPATURIAN: Would this by any chance be Lita Albuquerque?

SMITH: Yes. I tried to reach Jay Belloli [director of the Baxter Art Gallery, c. 1978–1985] when I was preparing for this interview, and I couldn't reach him. The relationship of the Caltech community with the gallery is interesting: a priori they disapproved of contemporary art because it is irrational, you know, meaningless. Meaningful by its meaninglessness. Subversive, and so on. But little by little, the gallery was totally espoused by the Pasadena community and the California community. Critics came from New York to review the exhibits.

ASPATURIAN: So David wanted the art to be, in its own way, as cutting edge as the science. He wanted it to be an artistic reflection of what Caltech was.

SMITH: Yes, that's a good way to put it. He was very brave. He expanded the program to other cultures. He did an exhibit on Tijuana artists, which was wonderful; Chinese art; even children's art; space photography; architecture drawings.

ASPATURIAN: How did he identify these artists? Did he do the work himself?

SMITH: He worked himself. He did the research. He wrote the catalogues and published them.

ASPATURIAN: Did you work with him on any of this?

SMITH: No. One of the catalogues—the African exhibit catalogue—got a national award.

ASPATURIAN: So he went out and identified—

SMITH: He went out, talked to artists; talked them into exhibiting at Caltech, which was not the most obvious thing for them. Little by little the Caltech community was won over. A sign of it was one exhibit that was an example of David's imagination. He had a whole exhibit on whales—whales in art.

ASPATURIAN: Do you remember when this was?

SMITH: In, let's see, in the fall of 1974. I remember us going up north and bringing back in a trailer a huge whale. And this huge whale—it was made up of something called fibro cement—was exhibited on the lawn between Baxter and the—

ASPATURIAN: Beckman Mall?

SMITH: Yes, that was it. In front of the auditorium. Oh, it was huge! It was wonderful when all the school kids of Pasadena came to climb on it, crawl through it and so on; and when the whale was gone, there were endless articles in the newspapers about how it was missed by the community. [Laughter] People were very emotional when it left.

ASPATURIAN: Has the history of the Baxter Art Gallery ever been written?

SMITH: Well, no, I don't think so. I hope it will be someday because the archives are all at the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art. Let me check my notes to see if there is something more to say about the gallery.

ASPATURIAN: It sounds like it had a very eclectic series of contemporary artists exhibiting. Some very well known; some not known at all.

SMITH: Well, some that became well known. Everything was high quality. David was one of the first people to exhibit hyperrealism, like the [presidential] portrait in the Athenaeum of Dr. Baltimore [David Baltimore, 1975 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine; president of Caltech, 1997–2006]. This art of painting that looks like photography. There was also an exhibit called "Surrealism is Alive and Well in Southern California," which was terrific. And so

many of these pieces are now in permanent museums. He had a piece from a California Center for the Arts, in the [San Fernando] Valley, by an electronic art guy. It was an electronic drum. A huge, circular piece, and I don't know how it was constructed, but very mysteriously from time to time it turned and played a rather eerie kind of music. It was a wonderful piece, very innovative. One version of it is now in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. David exhibited so many new things. He was very audacious.

ASPATURIAN: And you said that gradually some of these exhibits were written up, not only locally but nationally?

SMITH: Oh yes, nationally. When he died, there were articles in *The New York Times*, never referring to him as Professor Smith, but as the founder of the Baxter Gallery. The openings were such glamorous events, with all the elegant people from Pasadena and so on. But you wanted to know how it closed.

ASPATURIAN: I had started here not long before. [The gallery closed in 1985. *–Ed.*] It was all very abrupt. What happened?

SMITH: I should say before coming to this point that during the Jenijoy [La Belle] affair, as soon as Huttenback saw that he had lost the case, he immediately retaliated against all the people who had been on Jenijoy's side. He took the gallery away from David. Overnight. David received a memo—actually the division received the memo; it did not even go to David first. The division received a memo that said as of the date of the memo, the gallery was under the direction of Robert Rosenstone.

ASPATURIAN: This must have been 1977, 1978?

SMITH: Toward the end of the Jenijoy affair.

ASPATURIAN: David couldn't do anything about this?

SMITH: No, and he would not, you know. He was too proud. But I phoned Robert Rosenstone, and I said, "What's happening?" He said, "What? What? I haven't even read the memo." He read the memo. He said, "I'll call you back." He read the memo and probably made a couple of phone calls, and he phoned back, and said, "You know, I'm terribly sorry. I had nothing to do with that, but obviously Huttenback has made his decision and there is nothing we can do." So David lost the gallery and—

ASPATURIAN: That must have been difficult.

SMITH: Well, it was a shock. But, again, you know, go back to what I said about David's fundamental pessimism and stoicism. Yes, he was sorry, but he was reinstalled as gallery curator when Roger Noll became chairman [of the HSS Division]. And by then, compared to the gallery at the beginning, it was no longer a cottage industry. It had acquired a secretary, a part-time secretary at least, and a modest budget.

ASPATURIAN: It became institutionalized.

SMITH: It became institutionalized. Eventually, under Roger Noll and under [Noll's successor as HSS chairman] David Grether, in particular, David stopped being the director and became chairman of the board of the gallery or whatever. There were hired curators and the last one was Jay Belloli. I don't know if you go to the Armory Arts Center; Jay recently retired as curator for that. In the meantime, he published a book on the development of contemporary art in Pasadena in that period and it did not name Baxter or David once. I called him and I asked—because he's a good friend— "Jay, how could you?" And he said, "Yeah, I'm terribly sorry. I don't know what happened." I must say that I went to his retirement party. [Institute Professor of Chemistry Emeritus] Jack Roberts was there; and he and somebody else made speeches; and they talked a lot about Jack, whom I adore—I'm a fan—but he had nothing to do with the gallery. After the speeches, I talked with Jack, and he said, "I don't know. I don't understand why they put me into that picture. It's obviously David who merits all that praise." [Professor Roberts headed Caltech's Faculty Committee for the Arts for many years. *–Ed*] Well, anyway. *C'est la vie*. So [in 1985], over a very few days, Goldberger, who was a friend, a personal friend, closed the gallery. The explanation he gave was the budget; but, you know, it's unbelievable because in the

overall Caltech budget, the gallery was just a drop in the glass. But he said that, well, without the gallery, Caltech, could hire a new assistant professor, something like that. We never got an explanation, but I heard that it came back to Mildred Goldberger having a feud with the ladies of the [Pasadena] Art Alliance, who are very rich, and I must say sometimes not very nice. These Pasadena ladies supported the gallery, probably thus allowing it to exist, actually; because I think maybe Caltech was not putting enough money into it. But they are very rich ladies; some of them are imperious and snobbish. And of course, I can imagine the contact between them and Mildred Goldberger, who was so different, you know, and so frank. I'm sure they snubbed her.

After David died, Goldberger sent me a letter where he said that he considered closing the Baxter Gallery as the biggest gaffe in his career. Because, you know, it was an enormous PR asset for Caltech. It was not very expensive, and it was much more accessible to the general public than science lectures. It really involved the whole community. The last exhibit that David gave as a director was of [John] Altoon, and the whole Armenian community rallied around it. It was wonderful.

ASPATURIAN: It's a wonderful way to make a different kind of outreach for Caltech, to make it relevant to different areas of the community.

SMITH: Yes, and it was not really expensive. Anyway, we were very good friends with the Goldbergers, and we remained very good friends. I liked them very much. [Laughter] I can't judge, unlike Bob Oliver; I don't have that perspective on presidents and the "big" people. I can't tell you what I think of their regimes. But I certainly liked Murph a lot. The friendship started with—I think Mildred must have singled me out as somebody who liked to cook or something.

ASPATURIAN: This was when they first came to campus, in 1978, I believe.

SMITH: Yes, something like that. She called me one day and she said, "I brought back from Italy some seeds of an interesting plant. Do you want to share them with me?" So she shared the seeds. They were seeds of arugula. *Nobody* had them. We were the first people—

ASPATURIAN: In the United States of America?

SMITH: She and I— well, at least in this region—were the first people to grow and use arugula. And also Murph was a fabulous cook. He cooked Szechwan food, and it was excellent. We often had dinner together—well, often, I don't know, but at least several times. It was just four, six people in their pantry, where he cooked. We grew, in Malibu, asparagus and sugar snap peas; and so we brought them baskets of that for his Chinese cooking.

ASPATURIAN: What were they like personally? The Goldbergers?

SMITH: Oh, extremely warm and un-snobbish; simple, and she was so funny. She was very funny. [Laughter] I remember—I don't know, you'll have to edit this probably—one day when we discussed where with age our hair was disappearing from. It was very funny. [Laughter] You probably have heard from other people what she did at their good-bye party when they left Caltech.

ASPATURIAN: I don't think so.

SMITH: No? She stood at the door and she gave each student a condom. [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: I think maybe I have heard this. I believe she died a couple of years ago?

SMITH: Yes, unfortunately. But I saw Murph—

ASPATURIAN: And Murph is in La Jolla?

SMITH: Yes, and I saw him at an inauguration—maybe Baltimore's inauguration. I went to him, and I said, "Do you remember me?" He said, "Oh, boy, do I remember you!" You know, I was the one who pleaded with him to make things better for the staff.

ASPATURIAN: That's right, which you spoke about earlier [Session 2]. You mentioned your home in Malibu; and so I want to backtrack and ask about when you and David purchased a plot of land there and decided to build on it. What led you to do that?

SMITH: Well, we wanted to look for a place where we could retire. We looked all along the coast. We considered a little church in Los Osos, near Pismo, on the central coast.

ASPATURIAN: Oh that's a beautiful area.

SMITH: There was a church for sale there. We also considered the Padaro Lane in Santa Barbara, which is exquisite, but there was no water there. You had to bring your water. Well, anyway at some point, David remembered that when he was a child his father used to take him surf fishing on Point Dume. So we went there and we were totally enchanted by the landscape. It was much less built up than it is now. We first made an offer on a house on the land side, but we lost it in escrow, which was a good thing. Then we bought a lot on the bluff with the best view of the coast, really. It cost $75,000 and our joint life savings were $70,000. We put it all in, and we said we'll pay the rest in one year. And, you know, we were—

ASPATURIAN: That was quite a gamble.

SMITH: Yes. Another one! We were left without a *cent*. We had nothing in the bank.

ASPATURIAN: Did you worry about that?

SMITH: No, I didn't worry about not having money. But what I worried about is that shortly after that, [California governor] Jerry Brown, for whom we had voted, established a Coastal Commission. They put a moratorium on all those lots. So we not only couldn't build, we couldn't water; we couldn't fence it; but if somebody fell off our cliff we were responsible. So we fought the commission for seven and a half years. In fact, when I told you how we came back from camping out in Catalina in that terrible gale [Session 2], it was because there was a Coastal Commission meeting the next day, and we had to get there. There was a horrible guy named [Joseph] Edmiston, who is now head of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and is thoroughly hated by all of Malibu. For instance, there is a part of Malibu that burned two years ago. About sixty homes were burned to the ground, and Edmiston wants to turn this into a park, where you can camp overnight and cook over open fire. And that fire was started by young men who came and smoked. It's terrible. They just voted a compromise now that they could camp

overnight, but with little kerosene stoves. Anyway we fought the Coastal Commission. It was terrible. I remember meetings where Edmiston would get up and show the crowd a profile of the house that we wanted to build and say, "How would like to live next to an observatory?" Because our house is under a dome. Well, anyway, eventually the State of California decided that it didn't have the money to acquire all this land, so they acquired the point and the two adjacent lots where people wanted to sell, and they let us build.

ASPATURIAN: This took a few years, though, it sounds like?

SMITH: Seven and a half years. It was worth it. When we opened the house it was David's sixtieth birthday. As a birthday present, I had a flag made by a famous flag-maker who had made flags for all kings around the world.

ASPATURIAN: How lovely!

SMITH: Yes, and the flag is an ampersand and it's sort of a test of people who say, "What? Ampersand, what is that? What's the meaning?" Many do not know what it is. When you say, "It means 'and,'" they say, "And? And and what?" Well, that was the point. You know.

ASPATURIAN: In this picture, it also looks a bit like a very abstract "s."

SMITH: Yes, and also a key of *sol*. *Clé*, what do you say, *clé* of *sol*?

ASPATURIAN: Treble clef.

SMITH: We gave a big *méchoui* with two lambs for a huge crowd; and the Goldbergers came, and all of Caltech was there. Roger Noll made a speech where he said, to David, "I always knew you were a little crazy. But now I know you are completely crazy." [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: What year was this?

SMITH: 1981 or '82.

ASPATURIAN: Is there anything else you'd like to say about the seventies?

SMITH: Well, when you turn the recorder off, I will look at my notes to see if there is something that we didn't cover.

ASPATURIAN: Okay. Is this a good stopping place for you for a few minutes?

SMITH: Sure!

**Some material in this session was originally recorded during Interview Session 7.*

ANNETTE J. SMITH

SESSION 4

December 11, 2010

ASPATURIAN: So let's go into your friendship with the Delbrücks now in a bit more detail.

SMITH: They were associated with the best years of our lives in my mind. Manny was a lot of fun.

ASPATURIAN: I met her a couple of times. A very lively lady.

SMITH: Yes, very lively and enjoying herself every occasion, in every context. She was a terrific Scrabble player; and I remember one time—the only time—when I beat her, she was so astonished she couldn't believe it. [Laughter] About Max, we became—well, as I told you we knew them from Claremont. And when he and Murray Gell-Mann received the Nobel Prize in 1969, I was at the celebration Caltech held in their honor; and he talked about [Samuel] Beckett in his speech. I know that he did, too, in Sweden, in his Nobel acceptance speech. I love Beckett, too, so after that I sent him a little note referring to Beckett and said that I admired his speech very much. He responded. That's when they initiated the camping idea, as I mentioned earlier. We became close, perhaps because we were both from Europe. We had a common educational background in the classics. You probably know that he was from a very distinguished family.

ASPATURIAN: In Germany, I believe.

SMITH: In Germany, and they're all in the dictionary; even the *Petit Larousse* lists one of them. He studied physics because nobody else in his family was in physics so he had to distinguish himself. He had an ability to focus entirely on whatever he was talking about with whomever he was with, and on any topic. An example of that is the first or second time we went camping together. We adults were already at the camp, except for Max, who was riding in a separate car with his son Toby, who was perhaps eight years old. We were beginning to wonder what had

happened, when they arrived at night. They were late because Toby needed a new string for his yo-yo [laughter], and so Max had driven all over to find a string for the yo-yo. He had this ability to focus entirely on any subject and also to go through lots of BS, you know, right to the core of the subject. That was particularly obvious in lectures; he would sit at the back and at the last minute he would come out with a question about a problem that hadn't been solved. By the way, he was very, very supportive of my work on [Arthur de] Gobineau, which I'll tell you more about later. He could recite French and German poetry by heart. He could also make his research—very arcane work—clear to laypeople. He was totally without pretension. He was playful, and he was so to the end. He died of an abominable cancer, which had spread, a myeloma.

ASPATURIAN: Bone cancer?

SMITH: Well, it originates in the spinal column, and it had spread to the bone. He was in dreadful pain. His children had two beds, one above the other, and at that point he was sleeping in the lower one because he couldn't have gotten up from a regular bed. In that period, I visited him often; and just to show you how playful he was, we once looked at a book from the coffee table that was about Hieronymus Bosch.

ASPATURIAN: About his art?

SMITH: Yes, with a lot of pictures. There was one of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Max saw infinitesimal small details of the painting, and he said, "That cannot be a strawberry, because strawberries had not been imported to the Old World yet." He said, "Go to the toilet"—because that's where they kept their encyclopedias [laughter], rows and rows of them—and he said, "Look up what it can be." I made a long session in the toilet and found that it was an arbutus berry, which is a different kind of berry that actually is very common where I come from in North Africa. I think there are a few trees in California—for instance at the new Getty Villa. But it looks somewhat like a strawberry. It was European. Max was very triumphant.

ASPATURIAN: Strawberries are not native to Europe?

SMITH: Apparently not. He said they'd not been imported. I don't know where they come from. I'm taking his word that they hadn't been imported to Europe yet**. [**Post-interview research suggests that strawberries were cultivated in ancient Rome, to which A. Smith responds, "Well, even Max could be wrong at times." *–Ed.*] Another time where he showed his playfulness was when he was complaining of suffering from gas, and what with all the drugs he was taking, it was likely. I said, you know, Rabelais called that probably "carminative." He talks about food that is good and carminative, which generates gas in the digestion. And Max said, "Where does the word come from?" I said, "Well, obviously it comes from the Greek, *carmen*—you know, 'song'." That's what I thought, but he sent me to the toilet again to look in the encyclopedia and we found that it's a word which comes from the—I forgot the English word—the treatment of hemp. *Carminare* in Latin means "to clean."

ASPATURIAN: Marijuana?

SMITH: No, no, no, no. Hemp is marijuana, but they used hemp as a textile, you know. They treat hemp so it will not rot in water and that has—there's a word in the dictionary: "water-retting." That's where the word comes from, strangely enough. So we established that, and Max was really happy to have solved another important problem.

ASPATURIAN: Did the two of you speak English to each other, or French?

SMITH: No, we spoke English, but he knew French well.

The Delbrücks also were very supportive of the arts. They were very interested. They collected the works of a minor German Cubist painter, Jeanne Mammen, I think. You can see her work in various museums. They were also very supportive of the Baxter Art Gallery. I really think Max was the total Renaissance man. And then I think of his death. He was so stoic. I saw him regularly until a very few days before his death when he was transported to the hospital. We walked a little bit on the street, and we actually were talking about various concepts of being reborn, you know—

ASPATURIAN: Reincarnation.

SMITH: Reincarnation, and how the Romantics think that after death they are reborn and so on. But there's another streak in literature, the telluric streak, which has to do with rocks and the solid part of the planet, and it's associated with sleep, shade, death, and does not include rebirth. It's not part of the Dionysian myth. We talked about that and he said, "Well, I expect to disappear completely, you know; my atoms will join some other atoms and that's it." I have documents from him. He left me course notes and letters, a play he wrote for and with his children. Anecdotes, stories. We were very, very close.

ASPATURIAN: It sounds like it.

SMITH: Yes. I don't know why. Why a great man found time to talk to me to that extent, but, well, we were very good friends. And Manny, too. I think Max is an example of what they called "exemplary death," which is a minor literary genre in the English Renaissance. The exemplary death of great men.

ASPATURIAN: The noble death?

SMITH: Yes, noble death.

ASPATURIAN: Who would be a historical example of that?

SMITH: Socrates; or Montaigne's friend [Étienne] La Boétie. It became a genre. And actually, there's somebody at UCLA whom I met, who is writing, or has finished writing by now, a book on exemplary death, on the genre. I think Max had an exemplary death. So stoic and dignified.

ASPATURIAN: It sounds like he met it with a great deal of courage, especially since, as you say, he was in a lot of pain.

SMITH: Oh, yes, a lot of pain. And facing physical disintegration of his body. There was a memorial gathering for him at Caltech—David was one of the speakers. I remember that when it came to Jim Watson [1962 Nobel laureate in Physiology or Medicine], he ascended the podium, opened his mouth, and he started weeping and left the podium. I mean, it was very, very

touching because he has a reputation for being a very difficult man. And in fact, when I told this story just the other day to the Baltimores, they were amazed, knowing Jim Watson, to hear that.

After Max died, I also remained very much in touch with Manny. A few years before she died, she broke her back surfing in La Jolla. One of their sons lives there. She was, I don't know, almost seventy-nine or something like that. She did not recover completely from that accident. But in any case, at the same time as Max had his cancer, they discovered she had breast cancer. And Max had said, "Good thing. It will divert the attention from me. I'm tired to be the center of attention. Now we can think about Manny." The cancer came back and spread, and she died at the City of Hope. I saw her also maybe two days before death. The youngest daughter, Ludina, who strangely enough turned sort of Muslim after marrying an Egyptian was crying, and Manny was trying to reassure her and saying, "But no, no. You can live after my death. You can live without me, and you will." Then she asked us to read passages—I think it was from Proust, but I'm not sure—about the presence of the dead among us. So she had also a very beautiful, courageous death. You mentioned Roger Sperry? [Hixon Professor of Psychobiology; 1981 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine]

ASPATURIAN: Yes, I understand you knew him also.

SMITH: Yes, we knew him socially first. Well, first and last.

ASPATURIAN: How did you meet?

SMITH: They invited us to their house. I think that it was because there was a postdoc who worked with Sperry, or with Sperry's group on the stages of sleep—REM and things like that. Perhaps he's the one who took us there. I remember we danced a lot. He was a very good dancer; I never was. I don't know; we kept in touch; the Sperrys came to our house several times, and we went to theirs also a number of times. You know, I remember he spoke very softly. Do you remember his voice?

ASPATURIAN: I do.

SMITH: *Sotto voce*. He used to, once in a while, come out with something that was hugely important scientifically, and usually somewhat iconoclastic, but always in a modest way and very understated. I lost track of him when he got that terrible disease, the Lou Gehrig's Disease. We had moved to Malibu by then.

ASPATURIAN: Yes. ALS. I think when I first met him, he was in the early stages of that.

SMITH: But he was still working.

ASPATURIAN: He was still working. I do remember a couple times I was sitting in his office and he was talking about his work on consciousness and it is as you say; a couple of times he came out with something that just made me sit up and go, "Oh, my gosh!"

SMITH: It was so deep. Yes, yes.

ASPATURIAN: Very deep and *very* sharp. I think I may have these comments written down somewhere. But I remember one just made me just sit bolt upright. So this was obviously characteristic of the man.

SMITH: He was so shy, and retiring. He had a lovely wife.

ASPATURIAN: Was this Norma?

SMITH: Norma.

ASPATURIAN: I think I met her a couple of times.

SMITH: And a daughter with fibro-something, I think.

ASPATURIAN: Cystic fibrosis? I think I may have heard that.

SMITH: Yes. She was there when I visited with Norma after Roger's death. It was a long time after Roger's death because I had moved in the meantime. She was still alive, but you know, she had a difficult time.

ASPATURIAN: Ah, that's a rough one. Were there other members of the Caltech community you were close to?

SMITH: Well, Dick Feynman I knew but not well; nothing like Jenijoy. But I will tell you two moments that I remember. Once he stopped in my office when he was with a friend. They were carrying a heavy suitcase and they wanted a place to leave it, and he knocked on the door and came in. [Laughter] There was a book by Flaubert on my desk, *Three Tales*. He took the book and he said, "Oh, yeah, I've heard this guy is very good. Has he ever done anything else?" [Laughter] He was totally unpretentious—as Jenijoy mentions—outside of his field. She told me yesterday—I find that enormous—that Huttenback in his oral history says he was a fraud?

ASPATURIAN: Yes.

SMITH: On what ground?

ASPATURIAN: He said that he thought Feynman had a persona that he projected to the world at large, but that the real—

SMITH: As if Robert Huttenback didn't have one? [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: But that the real man was somewhat different.

SMITH: Anyway, I always remember that moment. And also, you know, there was a guy at JPL named Al Hibbs. You've heard of him?

ASPATURIAN: I met him.

SMITH: He was a great PR guy.

ASPATURIAN: The "Voice of Voyager."

SMITH: Yes. They had a huge house north of Pasadena. Actually, it was a haven for our children. They had a beautiful little natural pond with rocks around it, and so on; my children were there all the time. My son Pierre's best friend is Larry Wilson [public editor of the Pasadena *Star-News*], Marka Hibbs's son and a stepson of Al Hibbs. They surf together. They're like brothers. Well, so they used to give huge costume parties with a different theme every year. For the last one, I remember, you had to come as a king or a queen. In the reception line when they arrived, there was a woman with white gloves and a little purse and a hat on, and she looked very much like Queen Elizabeth.

ASPATURIAN: Queen Elizabeth the Second?

SMITH: And it was Feynman. [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: Oh my God! Did anyone take a picture?

SMITH: Oh, there must be. I don't have any, but I'm sure they're in the Archives. He had a wig. You know, his features—I was telling [David] Baltimore about this yesterday at lunch; and I said if you put a wig on him [Feynman], he really could pass very well as a woman because his features were sort of delicate. David wasn't sure, but anyway. [Laughter] Feynman was so funny. I didn't know him well, but I remember that he didn't like intrusions. One time after [Spanish dictator Francisco] Franco died, I was passing around a petition to make sure that he wouldn't be followed by another general, or perhaps, the king, in which case we were wrong because—

ASPATURIAN: Juan Carlos [Juan Carlos I, king of Spain] turned out to be pretty good. Kind of an amazing thing.

SMITH: Yes, he turned out to be pretty good. Feynman was alone in the cafeteria in a corner at lunchtime. I went to him with the petition, and ooooh!! He said, "What do I know about that? Leave me alone!" [Laughter] So, I left him alone.

The fourth Nobelist I knew was Willy Fowler [Institute Professor of Physics; 1983 Nobel Laureate in Physics], and that was because I have many, many friends who are astrophysicists. I remember the parties around Willy, especially when he got his Nobel. But I knew him long before; he came to my house. Because I was French, and I had a French table one day a week, outside Chandler Cafeteria. In the beginning, I used a French flag as a tablecloth, but one of the French guys, an astrophysicist, said, "Oh, no, you can't do that. It's not respectful." Well, anyway, the Francophones or the people who spoke or studied French could come there.

ASPATURIAN: This was part of your teaching?

SMITH: Yes. They could come and sit and converse. And several of those young French scientists who came to Caltech as doctoral students or postdocs were in physics and astrophysics, and we became and remained very, very close. One of them, Jean Audouze, later became director of the Paris Observatory in the Astrophysics Institute [Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris], and then Mitterand's [Francois Mitterand, president of France, 1981–1995] science attaché. And his wife, Françoise, was here, too. She was an archeologist who at the time was working on the Bronze Age, but she inevitably got acquainted with Marija Gimbutas, the Mother Goddess specialist I mentioned earlier who, of course, is very controversial. She was a friend of Joseph Campbell, which may not be a recommendation. But Françoise Audouze ended being a specialist of habitat and head of French archeology. And then there were a couple of astrophysicists: Catherine Cesarsky and her husband, Diego, were from Argentina, and they were postdocs at Caltech. She had a huge career. She became director of Material Sciences in France, which is, you know, reigning over all physics and chemistry. Then she became head of the ESO—the European Southern Observatory, which was in Munich. She lived in Munich and she reigned over astrophysics and space projects for all of Europe. Right now, she is in [French president Nicolas] Sarkozy's cabinet as the high commissioner of atomic energy. Then, there is another couple—the husband was Jean-Pierre Bibring, who is a planetary scientist and the main French guy on Mars, so much so that he actually is in constant contact with JPL. He helped JPL to focus on where they could find water because for a long period they were looking in the wrong places. [Bibring is principal investigator with the OMEGA/Mars Express mission, which

in 2004 became the first spacecraft to detect water ice at Mar's south pole. *–Ed.*] Anyway, he lived with us for a while when we lived in Altadena, and now he's my neighbor in Paris.

So all those people have become a second family, and I see them all the time here and in France, very actively. When I was in Paris several months ago, Catherine gave a big dinner. She reunited all the people who had been at Caltech that I knew. It's through them at the beginning that I knew Willy Fowler and—what's his name? Hubert Reeves, the Carl Sagan of French television. They are like my extended family.

ASPATURIAN: How about other scientists on campus?

SMITH: I knew many, but, I wasn't really aware of what they were doing exactly. The Cohens.

ASPATURIAN: Marshall and Shirley.

SMITH: Marshall and Shirley. The Corngolds—Noel and Cynthia. Among the things that I did for women are two things that I forgot to mention: One was to organize an encounter group for the staff at Caltech under the guidance of a local woman therapist. It went on for maybe three-quarters of a year; or maybe it went on afterwards because I quit at some point. I didn't think it was very constructive for the employees to tell their beefs and how terrible their bosses were. The other was that I borrowed the Baxter Gallery for a weekend and organized a women's art exhibit. And I mention it because Cynthia Corngold was an old friend and she was a very good painter. She participated in that exhibit. Who else did I know? [Beckman Professor of Chemistry] Harry Gray. I met him first as quite a young man.

ASPATURIAN: Was he about the same as he is now?

SMITH: Yes. He's very funny when he drinks a little, you know, declaring his eternal love to me, and so on—probably to a lot of people; everyone in a skirt. [Laughter]

SMITH: Of course, Barclay Kamb [Rawn Professor of Geology and Geophysics; Caltech provost, 1987–1989] and Linda Kamb were good friends. I went with the Kambs, the Fays, the Zachariasens, and the Ledyards to Bhutan. It was off and on a perilous trip. But we had a good

time. I think Peter [Fay] was beginning to act a little bizarrely. You know, he may have had the first symptoms of Alzheimer's.

ASPATURIAN: When was this that you went to Bhutan?

SMITH: Let's see. It was maybe at the end of the nineties. The Fays were very much in touch, fortunately, with the science faculty.

ASPATURIAN: More so, would you say, than with the humanities faculty?

SMITH: No. But you know the humanities faculty—the whole group sort of lost its cohesiveness. Clark Kent, David Elliott, and Hallett [Smith] retired, for one thing. Hallett and Beach Langston, of course, had died pretty early in that period. Who else was there? The people at the [Caltech] Y. What was the director's name? A very popular guy.

ASPATURIAN: Wes Hershey?

SMITH: Yes. And his wife?

ASPATURIAN: Jackie Bonner.

SMITH: Later she married Lyman Bonner. I liked her very much. But this humanities group faded out. And then we were quite middle-aged and you don't relate as much to the younger faculty. There are exceptions, such as Mac [George] Pigman, who, of course is himself no longer a young faculty member.

ASPATURIAN: Okay, so we'll stop here.

**Some material in this session was originally recorded during Interview Session 7.*

ANNETTE J. SMITH

SESSION 5

December 11, 2010

ASPATURIAN: Okay this is interview session five with Professor Annette Smith, and we'll pick up where we left off. So in the early 1980s, you went from being a lecturer to an associate professor. What were the circumstances surrounding that?

SMITH: The circumstances were a change of regime. Roger Noll became chairman and—

ASPATURIAN: He was an alum [Caltech BS 1962], I believe.

SMITH: Yes, he was in David's first class at Caltech as a freshman. David had Roger Noll, [Professor of Theoretical Physics] Kip Thorne, and this mathematician who was Master [of the Student Houses] for a while.

ASPATURIAN: David Wales?

SMITH: Yes, David Wales. Good class, right, for a young professor to start with?

ASPATURIAN: Yes, very.

SMITH: There was a sigh of relief for a lot of us when Roger took over because there had been so much tension and anger under Huttenback. Although, I want to repeat again that Huttenback was very nice to me. He never apologized for taking the Art Gallery away from David, but to me, personally, he was always very benevolent. And under Roger, the expansion of the division up the social science road, accelerated. Roger was—did you know him?

ASPATURIAN: I did not. I have just heard about him.

SMITH: He had a booming voice and a huge laugh. He was *such* a great, large person. He was so kind, so understanding and intuitive. I thought he was a wonderful chairman and I was very sorry that he went to greener pastures [Stanford University], but people said he wanted to turn Caltech into a full university by, you know, increasing the size of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division. He was very, very supportive of the Baxter Art Gallery, and of poetry and literature on the campus. He had poets-in-residence. I loved Roger's energy.

Anyway, it was a period, I think, where the division became very ambitious in literature and they started hiring professors and special chairs with funds from the Mellon and Dreyfus foundations. The first one—I think a Dreyfus Professor, a specialist of poetics—was a sort of a fizzle. He left in mid-course for personal reasons, having not even completed one year. I think it had to do with his companion. And at some point, Jerry McGann came, and David had something to do with that because he was a personal friend and a brilliant, charismatic Romanticist; and David was able to sell him to the division.

ASPATURIAN: So McGann's specialty was Romantic poetry?

SMITH: Romanticism, yes. A very well-known guy. He was very handsome and so on. But, you know, he definitely enriched the substance of the division, the courses. But after a while, he wanted more graduate students; he wanted to expand. That's when he clashed against the historians, and particularly [Professor of History] Morgan Kousser, who had, I guess, either similar ambitions or, in any case, didn't want the other side of humanities in the division to gain too much ground. I'm not sure because I was probably not on the faculty yet, but they must have opposed something that Jerry particularly wanted and so he left. He got a chaired professorship at Virginia. After him, I remember John Sutherland came, and I lost track, somewhat, of the other new appointments.

While Jerry was at Caltech, that's when the tremendous change happened for me, because by then the [Aimé] Césaire book, coauthored with Clayton Eshleman, was in press with the University of California Press. And the [Arthur de] Gobineau book was also accepted by a fine French publishing house.

ASPATURIAN: So you had had two books, either in print or—

SMITH: Accepted for publication. Both of them, when they were published, were internationally reviewed, and very favorably so. The Césaire book had more visibility, was reviewed all over the U.S. and ended as the Number 2 finalist in the *LA Times* Book Prize in Poetry. But the Gobineau was also very well reviewed in lots of other countries. So Roger proposed to give me a faculty slot. Although "give" is not exactly the word: I had earned it the hard way.

ASPATURIAN: So he proposed this within the division first?

SMITH: Yes. And so they started the process of peer reviews, etc. It actually happened partly while I was in France on a vacation or doing research. I forget. But, I know that the process was slowed down by John Benton. John Benton had a real animus toward me.

ASPATURIAN: He was a professor of medieval history, I believe. Medieval European history.

SMITH: Yes. Have you heard a lot about him?

ASPATURIAN: He was alive during my first years here. And the last thing I remember was that he had begun a study suggesting that Abélard wrote all the letters of his and Héloïse's. That sounded interesting, but then he died.

SMITH: That's the last thing you heard?

ASPATURIAN: Yes.

SMITH: Well, let me go back. He had come to Caltech because of a book he had published on a French monk. I think it was early in the period of the archival style of history.

ASPATURIAN: What monk was this?

SMITH: I forgot his name. It was not Bede. It was less famous.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, Bede was an Anglican; well, no, but he was Anglo-Saxon.

SMITH: No, this was a French one. Benton had had a Fulbright at Clermont-Ferrand. He had a very provincial career. He had a Fulbright and that one book; and for some reason he just disliked me. Maybe it was because he knew that I knew that his French was not as good as he claimed. He was mean. He was in constant physical pain, and that may be an explanation.

ASPATURIAN: That can make people unpleasant.

SMITH: But he was mean to all vulnerable people in the division, all the young people. I was not young, but I was a junior faculty member, you know.

ASPATURIAN: When did he show up?

SMITH: Oh. In the seventies; maybe late sixties. Because when we moved to the MOSH House, they were living next door.

ASPATURIAN: I'll look it up. [David Smith was Master of Student Houses from 1969-1975. – Ed.]

ASPATURIAN: So he was a full professor and you were still a lecturer?

SMITH: And he was executive officer for the humanities then. He dragged his feet on my tenure review process, so much so that one day— I don't know who told me—Roger said, "Enough, let's get on with that. Let's get it done." And, of course, the peer review letters were very good and so on. John was perhaps also jealous because I have a lot of connections with very fine academics in France. Maybe that was part of it.

ASPATURIAN: It's not like your areas of research overlapped at all.

SMITH: No. And actually, he never was my enemy. But it was clear I was *his* enemy. In spite of that, I was promoted. But about the article that you mentioned, about Héloïse and Abélard; the end of the story is that it was such a shock in the medievalist world that an old French

medievalist is reputed to have died of a heart attack upon this revelation. And then it was proved completely wrong a few months later.

ASPATURIAN: I wondered about that. He based it on some sort of textual analysis.

SMITH: Yes, using technology that he got from JPL, a new way to read through manuscripts. But it was completely wrong.

ASPATURIAN: So it was a discredited theory.

SMITH: Oh yes. He never apologized or published a retraction or anything.

ASPATURIAN: Did he die before he had a chance to? He died quite soon, I think, after announcing it.

SMITH: Yes, in fact, shortly after I was promoted, he fell off a staircase and broke his neck and died instantly [1988]. And he had received a MacArthur Fellowship before [1985], and everybody who knew him wondered how on earth, why on earth, he got a MacArthur. Probably through the intervention of Murray Gell-Mann.

ASPATURIAN: Were they friends?

SMITH: Apparently.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, Murray was on the MacArthur Awards Committee for many years; that's right.

SMITH: So, anyway, you know, R.I.P. He was married to an angel of a wife.

ASPATURIAN: Elspeth.

SMITH: Yes, who discovered after his death that he had cheated on her a lot. She remarried, several times. The first of those husbands died in bed with her. But she remarried again. She was a very, very beautiful woman.

ASPATURIAN: She ran the children's center [Children's Center at Caltech], I remember.

SMITH: Yes. She was wonderful.

ASPATURIAN: I would like to ask a question. Was the fact that you were married to another faculty member an asset or an impediment, or do you think it was fairly unimportant with regard to promotion?

SMITH: I don't think it was an impediment. You know, in the Caltech plan there was no room for the foreign languages on the faculty, and that was that. It was Roger who changed that for me.

ASPATURIAN: No, I mean the fact that you became a professor, do you think there was any—

SMITH: No, I can't believe so. I had been eleven years a lecturer, a professor-in-waiting, you know. I can't believe that David inserted himself at all in all these meetings. I know he did not.

ASPATURIAN: So it was all done very appropriately

SMITH: Yes, absolutely.

ASPATURIAN: And I believe that [Caltech President] Goldberger had also said that he wanted more qualified women on the faculty. So that must have been helpful.

SMITH: Yes, it's possible. Because I always felt that somehow Goldberger was in my camp. He never said so, but I always felt that he was benevolent. And I was the second woman in the history of Caltech to be promoted from lecturer to faculty rank**,** after [Professor of Mathematics] Olga Todd.

ASPATURIAN: Quite a distinguished pedigree there.

SMITH: She was so distinguished, and so modest.

ASPATURIAN: Did you know Olga?

SMITH: Oh, yes! I didn't know her well; she was very shy. But when we met, I could tell she had a particular affection for me because we were in the same boat—we were both qualified women who were lecturers, and so on. I was so pleased that she was shot up to full professor.

ASPATURIAN: Many years overdue, but finally.

SMITH: Yes, absolutely.

ASPATURIAN: So you became an associate professor in 1982? You were an associate professor from '82 to '85, and then they tenured you? Or did they tenure you when they appointed you?

SMITH: No, no. I was appointed as a tenured associate professor.

ASPATURIAN: Ah, very nice. Yes, let's backtrack a little bit and talk about your first two books. Also! what led you to—

SMITH: Yes, why the exclamation mark? "I have a question for you," there should be no exclamation mark. Why?

ASPATURIAN: Well, Gobineau. He has a fairly notorious reputation.

SMITH: That's correct.

ASPATURIAN: And as you begin to read what some of his theories are, you can understand why he has a fairly notorious reputation.

SMITH: What have you read?

ASPATURIAN: Well, that he believed—

SMITH: What have you read *by* him?

ASPATURIAN: Oh, I've read *nothing* by him.

SMITH: That's the beginning of the story. His notorious reputation is maintained by people—and encyclopedias and dictionaries—who have never read his work. I actually was rereading a bit of my book on him today. This book [*Gobineau et l'Histoire Naturelle*] is hard to read. It took six or seven years of work. It's an immense panorama. It's terribly scholarly.

ASPATURIAN: I see it is written in French.

SMITH: Yes, it's in French. But the one I did in translation with David [*Mademoiselle Irnois and Other Stories*, translated and edited by Annette Smith and David Smith], has a thirty-four page introduction, which is wonderful, really. So if you want to approach Gobineau, I suggest you read this book.

ASPATURIAN: What in the world led you to Gobineau?

SMITH: It was the author on whom I had done my dissertation [Nicole Védrès, see Session 1], who said that the best short story she had ever read was *Adélaïde* by Gobineau. I had never heard his name before. But then I read that story, and I thought that indeed it had something so strong about it and so animal.

ASPATURIAN: What is the plot?

SMITH: The plot is about two women—an aristocratic German woman, a countess, and her daughter Adélaïde. The countess has a husband who is younger than she and not a very strong man. Adélaïde seduces him, and from then on it becomes a fierce war between the two females, disputing over that male object, who happens not to be an alpha male but rather passive. It goes on for years and becomes an exercise that they ritualize, an exercise they enjoy. Both of them

thoroughly despise the object of their rivalry. It was a wonderful story and so I read more of him. Then I read the *Essay* [*An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*]. Of course, the question everybody asks is about his anti-Semitism.

ASPATURIAN: Well, according to what I understand, he wasn't anti-Semitic at all. He was an inspiration for Nazi anti-Semitism, but they had to sanitize him.

SMITH: He was an inspiration for them, you know, *after he died*. The only Nazi who actually names him is [Houston] Stewart Chamberlain. He despised Gobineau because Gobineau did not believe that Germany was a repository of the Aryan race and he didn't believe in central governments. It's statistically proved with figures that the *Essay* was not read in Germany. They read a few literary works of his: *La Renaissance* and maybe some other works had some readership, but certainly not the *Essay*.

ASPATURIAN: He seems to have believed that Asians were inferior, though, which—

SMITH: That Asians were what?

ASPATURIAN: That Asians, which I suppose he would have called Orientals, were inferior as a race.

SMITH: No, no, no. Let me start at the beginning. He was very influenced by the naturalist tradition and by the Aristotelian vein in it, which considers that the species are created separately and not evolving from one another, as in Darwin. He somehow applied to the races the characteristics of the species. So he considered that the races had been created separately and that they were meant to remain defined by very precise characteristics. To answer your question, the blacks were the artists. They were sort of the female race. The yellow were the tradespeople and the organizers, and they were sort of the male race. The advantage of the white race, which, you know, he—

ASPATURIAN: So-called advantage.

SMITH: So-called, yes. In his imagination, they were an original Aryan race that had populated Europe. Their advantages were that they combined the virtues of the others and thus could have what generates a stable civilization. As to the Jews, he admired the ancient Jews very much. He didn't call them a race—they were part of the white race. But through migrations, they—and other peoples—had been the instruments of miscegenation. In any case, through big migrations, all the races got mixed up, and the result was that in his time—in modern times—we ended with a mixture that's homogenized, but decadent, characterless, like a cocktail in which you put too many ingredients. So he despised the Jews, but he despised the French, he despised the Germans. He despised everybody because they had long lost their integrity as a culture.

ASPATURIAN: Except—

SMITH: Well, he thought that perhaps in Scandinavia there were a few remnants of the original Aryans. But he despised all people, and certainly Germans—

ASPATURIAN: Which he must have considered a mongrel race by this time.

SMITH: He did, he did. So when the Germans used his theories to generate Nazism, it was a fraud. First, Gobineau would have been incapable of conceiving a genocide. He didn't believe in central governments. He was a friend of [the composer Richard] Wagner, but their correspondence is limited to artistic subjects, mostly.

ASPATURIAN: How would you identify him, then, in terms of his ideology or his philosophy?

SMITH: He was a racist. He was a philosopher of racism, but, you know, he belonged to a century where systems blossomed. There were so many systems in the nineteenth century. For instance, [Ernest] Renan was racist, so why don't they say Renanism? And there was racism in England too.

ASPATURIAN: Artistically Gobineau seems to have had—well, certain gifts as you describe him. So this must have been of interest to you—the contrast between his talents and his philosophy.

SMITH: He's a very good literary writer, but what appeals to me in his philosophy is that he mourns the variety and the diversity lacking in our modern world and how we are not aware that that world has been leveled down in every way, in architecture, in culture; and I am grateful to him that he mourned the loss of these values. In a way that places him not so far from a guy like [Claude] Lévi-Strauss, who was working on the diversity of the cultures of the world and also bemoaned the gradual loss of that diversity.

ASPATURIAN: So your first book on him was about what?

SMITH: It's difficult, because it's very complex. I wanted to track his work back to the traditional, natural history, and particularly to the Aristotelian tradition to which he belonged. But it ends being also, you know, sort of a history of racism because in analyzing the sources of Gobineau and the influences on him, I also talk about comparable philosophers and so it's an itinerary, if you want, of a racist—the intellectual itinerary of a racist. So my interest was in tackling an author who was controversial but actually little-known, because little-read; seemingly full of contradictions, but actually totally consistent if viewed from the central principle of organicism—to reorganize his whole philosophical, political and literary world along the lines of an organic metaphor. And also I wanted, because of my own family origins, to reexamine the role he played in the rehabilitation of Islam and the Orient. He was an ardent Orientalist in his time. He was a diplomat by career, and he went twice to Persia as a diplomat. He wrote books about the religion and philosophy of Central Asia and also the culture of Iran—Persia—and Central Asia, which are still valued and still quoted by today's Orientalists. Actually, they're not only valued, but they're also prophetic because somewhere he wrote that the race of imams had not died and that they would resurface, that the shah would be dethroned, and that someday there would be one imam who would rule Persia. So, how true! He also, in his day, was one of the few anticolonialists.

ASPATURIAN: This would be because he objected to the mixings of people, I assume.

SMITH: Well, yes, but not only that. He very much protested against the Algerian conquest, which he found silly, gratuitous. For one thing, he was against the bourgeois world and its power—bourgeois expansion, and so on. So colonialism, for him, represented that as well—an

unnecessary expansion of the bourgeois culture and values. He was against slavery, but of course the Americans say that it was to avoid miscegenation. Not true! He also defended the Native Americans. Well, anyway, it was intellectually a very interesting exercise to relate his position to the Scale of Being, which is an old Aristotelian or Platonistic system actually, where you rank the animals from the worm to man. In the second part of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth, there was a lot of debate about the Scale of Being, and scientists lined up in two camps—the continuous camp, which said that there was a continuity between all beings and creatures, and the other side, which said that they were totally separated, and that between the ape and man there was an abyss. Of course, Gobineau was in this camp.

ASPATURIAN: The anti-Darwinian camp?

SMITH: Darwin was not on the scene. This was pre-Darwin. It was, in a way, a rehearsal, if you want, of the Darwinian debates, this controversy about the Scale of Being. You know, the ape was successively considered as a primitive species—a man with a long tail—a satyr, or an American. [Laughter] But Gobineau was capable of a terrific relativism because, for instance, he wrote somewhere that man was a newcomer in the world, that geology registered his absence from all early formations of the earth. There was in Gobineau a pull toward a decentralization and de-anthropomorphism. That's what's very interesting; that actually appeals to me very much. When Darwin enters this scene, he's actually ignored from 1859, when he published *The Origin of Species*, to 1862. In 1862 *The Origin of Species* was translated into French in a very loose translation that somewhat betrayed Darwin. The French scientific milieu continued to line up in two camps. One camp fought Darwin, and Darwin failed several times to be elected as a foreign member of the French Academy of Sciences. But after 1878, when he had published *The Descent of Man* [1871] and the theory of emotions [*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 1872], the anti-Darwinians really had to tackle him then. And Gobineau in the beginning of this was very influenced by [Jean Louis Rodolphe] Agassiz—the American scientist who also took part in those debates and in the long run could not approve of Darwin because he was a Christian.

At the beginning, Gobineau is ambiguous about Darwin, because some of Darwin's concepts like natural selection resembled his own views about the survival of races—which races

survived better than others. At some point, he even took Darwin's side. But in the long run, he couldn't accept Darwin. First, because of the idea that man descends not only from the ape, but from a previous species of ape. He couldn't accept that, except as a joke at the expense of Darwin's partisans. For instance, when he quips about modern culture, he says, "Well, we do not descend from the ape. We're getting there." But eventually what made it impossible for him to accept evolutionism is the matter of time; because the old Aristotelian principle of creation of the species all at once is placed outside of time. He needed—as [Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de] Buffon—the atemporal perfection of nature. In his life, Gobineau always tried to evade time by various devices—one of which was to invent for himself an imaginary early Aryan ancestor. He felt that Darwin's concept implied the triumph of chance and relativity, you know, over an established order.

ASPATURIAN: Which he could not deal with.

SMITH: And he could not deal with that. He would have accepted the part of Darwin that diminishes man in a way by placing him in the animal order. That he could have accepted. But the temporality of Darwin's system was unacceptable to him. He equated temporality to the Fall a Fall, with a capital F. [i.e., the Biblical Fall. *–Ed.*] Well, anyway, I was attracted by reorganizing a whole system like his around this principle of organicism, which made me study the concept itself over a long period, in all its manifestations.

ASPATURIAN: This book was published in French, and you say very well reviewed.

SMITH: Yes; oh, yes, in France, Italy, Poland. And the *British Journal for the History of Science* gave it a beautiful review, which somewhat annoyed John Benton.

ASPATURIAN: Was it ever translated?

SMITH: No, it was never translated. I never pushed very hard for it. I'm not a career animal. I do the things that I like, and then I turn the page. That's why I did things that are *so* different, but actually when I look at my career, it doesn't zigzag. It turns in circles. Gobineau wrote some of the best short stories in the nineteenth century—and also one great novel; and some very

bad novels as well. This idea of the organic world completely penetrates his literary world; and he applied to his characters principles inspired by the animal world—aggression, bonding, hierarchy, social hierarchies, and it makes very interesting reading.

ASPATURIAN: I'm sure it does in light of some of the studies of behaviorism going on today.

SMITH: Yes. Of course, I was very badly looked upon by so many of the literature people in my division because it was a period of total subjectivism in literary studies and to write about a writer who had the real world as a referent was a no-no. It was an audacious undertaking; I had debates with anthropologists and so on. Also, it was a period where culture prevailed over nature—the idea that behavior was essentially the product of culture, not of nature.

ASPATURIAN: Gobineau said something very different; of course, he took it to an extreme.

SMITH: Also it was badly viewed because when I write about Gobineau's characters, people say, "But what about the author? You know, you say they respond to this and that law of nature, but I mean, it's the author who makes them respond to that." But my argument is that the author himself is programmed to respond to this or that instinct and, therefore, his characters are bound to reflect those instinctive behaviors. I say here [reading] "Gobineau, writing, goes beyond revealing traits and structures similar to those of the animal world. Traits or structures that are beyond the conscious behavior of the character, and I dare say, beyond the conscious intention of the author."

ASPATURIAN: Well, of course, all great writers—

SMITH: I once wrote an article about the structures of play in very different writers. I think they were Rabelais, Molière, Diderot, and Zola. And, you know, to me those writers have very different styles, genres, and periods, but their structures of play are the same when you look at them. They all keep the characteristic of what play is in the animal world. I find it very interesting that those similarities exist in spite of the disparity of the works. But that interpretation was not well received by some of my colleagues. Anyway I see in Gobineau something that is even beyond classicism—classicism is supposed to be what you heard in class

and also what is universal. And usually it means *socially* universal. But Gobineau goes beyond classicism because it makes me discover—in the sense of Columbus discovering America—a sense of space, a spatiality. A different, other world, beyond the human. I find that extremely reassuring myself, to belong to something beyond, that is not religious. That's why I am interested in Gobineau.

And then I did a translation of some of his writings with David. This was not very long before David died, and it was my idea, of course. [Laughter] We translated some short stories that I considered to be the best of Gobineau, and there is this very good, short introduction. It was a *great* pleasure to work together: I brought into it my Gobineau expertise; but David wrote very well and was a wonderful editor. We went to Paris and we went to the Bibliothèque Nationale to find period illustrations, which was fun, too. We did everything for that book, including the jacket, and it was so much fun. People ask me, "What? You got along well doing the book?" And, yes, very well; whereas every Saturday, we divorced over the garden. [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: The book was fine; the flowers were not.

SMITH: Apparently where you plant a tree is terribly important.

ASPATURIAN: That's very funny.

SMITH: It was a great time. You have enough of Gobineau?

ASPATURIAN: I think so, unless there is more that you would like to say about him?

SMITH: Well, let me try to sum it up. The basic instinctive behaviors that come through in Gobineau's fiction are those that maintain life in cohesive animal societies: courtship, aggression, bonding, social hierarchy. From there, he derives a whole concept of families, of individual relationships, of social hierarchy, a political system, based on a general distrust of the law, which is too abstract, ignores differences, a hierarchy based on biological merit—which doesn't mean brutish merit or physical superiority, but energy, loyalty, and force of character.

"Justice," he wrote somewhere, "is not synonymous with equality." So, I think nowadays he would be a compassionate, honest Republican.

ASPATURIAN: Maybe. I mean, so much has taken place between his time and ours that—who knows?

SMITH: But you don't think that is an accurate description of a Republican viewpoint, that justice is not synonymous with equality?

ASPATURIAN: I don't know. What strikes me is that in some ways he was ahead of his time in saying culture is a veneer; what we must look at more seriously are the biological—for want of a better word, roots of humanity. And a lot of this must have been rooted in his understanding that human psychology was at some level highly irrational and that behavior could not be rationally predicted. But it almost sounds as if in an effort to bring some order out of that chaos, which he was clearly in tune with, he fell into these very rigid and as you say racist classifications as kind of—a defense against the chaos? I don't know. It's an interesting thing.

SMITH: Well, it is a defense against time, the decay of the world through time.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, that's one way of looking at it. I think today, perhaps, with all the quantitative tools that are at our command, he might have been a happier man.

SMITH: Yes; and you know we were talking about [Roger] Sperry, but when you think about the kind of thing that Sperry was working on, I am convinced that as science progresses, we will fit more and more into the general, natural world.

ASPATURIAN: So to me Gobineau is an interesting example of, you know, insight and psychopathology kind of co-existing.

SMITH: Yes. He was in a way paranoid. He had a bad marriage. His daughters did not like him, although he was very generous to them, but he was not such a happy man.

ASPATURIAN: It's interesting. You find this a lot in the great Russian writers, particularly Dostoyevsky and Gogol, this insight and psychopathology.

SMITH: I don't know them as well as you do, apparently, but I'd like to. You know more about them. I mean, I have read them, as a general reader.

ASPATURIAN: I like Dostoyevsky very much, but I also recognize that he, like Gobineau, had very reactionary views about humanity, partially because he understood its dark side so well he didn't know how to deal with it. I'm sorry; I've gone off track.

SMITH: No, I am glad you add that to the picture.

ASPATURIAN: I would say, it sounds like at the opposite end of the spectrum is Césaire. Would that be correct? This was a name that was totally unknown to me.

SMITH: Aimé Césaire? Very, very famous. When he died in 2008, all the French government stood by his grave in Martinique, and moreover leaders from all over the world, particularly the Third World, attended. He was a great, great force, the founder, the inventor, of the word "négritude," which sort of summarizes the black ideal, the beauty, of their nature and culture.

ASPATURIAN: What led you to his work?

SMITH: Actually I had an early connection with it that I had not exploited, which is that my very sort-of surrogate father—the colonial historian that I spoke about at the beginning, Charles-André Julien—was also a famous socialist who had known Lenin and had been the campaign manager of [Jean] Jaurès, the French socialist leader. He wrote the introduction to one of Césaire's books, *Letter Against Colonialism*. [*Discours sur le colonialism*]. I didn't really know about Césaire either, but around 1975 or 1976, when we moved out of the Master's house to Altadena, I was approached by an American poet named Clayton Eshleman. Clayton is a poet with quite a following. He writes very gutsy poetry, and he can be very inspiring. However, he doesn't have a classical culture, and Césaire is a man who was a high-school teacher of classics and had an immense classical culture. His poetry is *extremely* difficult. It's one of the most

difficult texts you can approach. Eventually we published four volumes of Césaire together. The first one, published by the UC Press, is still sort of a classic [*Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry, 1983*. –Ed]. One was published by Braziller, and another volume was done by the University of Virginia Press. Wesleyan University did a smaller volume with his first and best-known work, called *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. It is a long meditation when, supposedly, the young man returns to Martinique after being a student in Paris, and faces the misery and impotence of the blacks in Martinique as well as their political slavery. The poem is a long descent from which he emerges with screams of pride and triumph, celebrating the beauty of the black race, all their talents, etc.; and it ends with a fantastic hymn, which has the form of a voyage; the narrator is now no longer on the slave ship, but sailing freely on the pirogue.

It's a very long poem. Perhaps I'll read you the end of it. Let's see. He's in the pirogue talking to the wind. "Coil, wind, around my new growth/light on my cadenced fingers/to you I surrender my conscience and its fleshy rhythm/to you I surrender the fire in which my weakness smolders/to you I surrender the 'chain-gang'/to you the swamps/to you the non-tourist of the triangular circuit/devour wind/to you I surrender my abrupt words/ devour and encoil yourself/and self-encoiling embrace me with a more ample shudder/embrace me unto furious us/embrace, embrace us/but having also bitten us/to the blood of our blood bitten us!/embrace, my purity mingles only with yours/so then embrace/like a field of even filaos/at dusk/our multicolored purities/and bind, bind me without remorse/bind me with your vast arms of luminous clay/bind my black vibration to the very navel of the world/bind, bind me, bitter brotherhood/then, strangling me with your lasso of stars/rise, Dove/rise/rise/rise/I follow you who are imprinted on my ancestral white cornea/rise sky licker/and the great black hole where a moon ago I wanted to drown/it is there I will now fish the malevolent tongue of the night in its motionless veerition!"

ASPATURIAN: The imagery is very powerful.

SMITH: Very powerful. He's an icon in the Third World, and he was mayor of Fort de France [capital of Martinique] and a deputy in the French Assembly and a constantly subversive voice, fighting against colonialism and injustice in general.

ASPATURIAN: So he was a public intellectual, like President [Václav] Havel of Czechoslovakia, or I guess it's the Czech Republic now.

SMITH: That's a good comparison. Even after his retirement, he was still involved politically, several years ago, in a controversy over the anniversary of the end of the Algerian War. The French parliament considered passing a law that would recognize publicly that the French presence in Algeria had been a great thing. And Césaire, who was long retired and living by then in Martinique, went to battle over that with Sarkozy. They had to delete that part of the bill. Needless to say, he's not really popular with the average "pied-noir;" that is, people like me who are born in North Africa but are of European descent. We're also Créoles, you know; that's the real meaning of the word Créole—people of European origin born in the colonies.

Césaire's very difficult poetically; and, as I said, Eshleman had some poetic inspiration, and he was a fantastic scribe. I hate to type manuscripts and keep track of things, and he was a fantastic publicity man, much more aggressive than I. He is very good at appearing in public, inserting himself into conferences, and so forth.

ASPATURIAN: So what was the division of labor? Did you do the translating?

SMITH: We did it together. We started with a text that I would dictate to him, and then we would work on it together, and he would make some suggestion that I would reject or approve or discuss, or maybe I would suggest something else instead. We would go through two or more manuscripts. There isn't a word in those books that is not mine. Not one.

ASPATURIAN: Poetry is a great challenge, I think, to translate from one language to another. Can you talk a little about the process for you?

SMITH: Indeed. Well, it's the opposite of working on Gobineau because working on Gobineau you reconstruct a world and you are an active force in it, in that construction. For translation, you have to make yourself transparent, so to speak. Translation is a practice of de-centering oneself. There are various theories on translation, but on the whole this whole idea that the translated text has to become digested by the new language to the point of invisibility is out of fashion since the critic Walter Benjamin developed his very beautiful theories about language.

He said that in translating poetry it is treason if you try to digest the "otherness" of the original text. You should preserve its otherness, out of respect for the original. Very interesting theory, which he relates to the Tower of Babel in the Bible. In translating Césaire, it is not difficult to respect the otherness because he is so "other." I wrote a lot of articles on Césaire. One is called *Césaire au féminin; où et comment chercher la femme dans son oeuvre*—"Césaire in the Feminine: Where and How To 'Chercher La Femme' in His Work"—and it was completely different from what had been done so far about the women in Césaire's work. Because I took the concept of what a feminine, or a female language could be, as it was developed by philosophers like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, and I applied that to Césaire's language. I found in his poetry the same characteristics. These women think that poetry goes back to a childish part of us where the verbal language does not yet develop, but the child lives through rhythm.

ASPATURIAN: And imagery, I assume.

SMITH: Well they don't mention so much imagery, but rhythm, something physical, audible, halfway between motion and sound. This would precede the verbal stage in the child. Well, this language of woman, as they define it, would have a predilection for the heterogeneous and would also be against logic. It could fuse two opposed concepts, you know. It would be against syntax because syntax, of course, establishes order. So it would practice systematic syntactical disruption. And it would be extremely pluralistic because that's reflecting the woman's sensuality. Also, it would be a language against power because the feminists reject the concept of power itself. They don't want to replace male power by feminine power. If you look at Césaire, you find all of these characteristics in his writing: Absence of punctuation; labyrinthine syntax; fireworks of propositions, each birthing the next one; disrupted word order, other than the western order; cultural and political pluralism.

ASPATURIAN: He wrote in French exclusively?

SMITH: Yes. Plus, he has a use of absolute ablatives, which totally puzzles readers. A series of endless genitives. His language is very heterogeneous. It's like molecular, with molecules moving together very freely.

ASPATURIAN: Like Emily Dickinson, it sounds like.

SMITH: Well, you know, yes. I've never thought of that, but I must re-read her aloud.

ASPATURIAN: Her syntax seems deliberately fractured and it's part of the power of her poetry.

SMITH: And then, his vocabulary is completely off-putting because it's full of rare, or technical words or exotic words, of neologisms, of untranslatable puns and homophones, of echoes, etc.

ASPATURIAN: How do you deal with that?

SMITH: Well, you deal with it the best you can. [Laughter] Sometimes for the puns, you have to find equivalents, even at the cost of departing from the text. You do your best.

ASPATURIAN: I would like to just ask a question: Do you think a poetic translation can ever entirely convey the essence of the original?

SMITH: No. But I think that you can come close; you must strive.

ASPATURIAN: You get as close as you can.

SMITH: Yes, coming as close as you can. But certainly, there is a very delicate balance between making the text readable and preserving its otherness. It's very difficult.

ASPATURIAN: That's what I was wondering about. Quite a tightrope walk.

SMITH: Absolutely. In this introduction, which I largely wrote by the way—but I'll speak later about the logistics of the collaboration—I say that [reading], "At the same time, one must keep a clear view of the structure but yield to the movement," and I compare this to a coitus interruptus.

Césaire was a great scholar. His style is complex but it is never chaotic. It is not cohesive, but it is coherent.

ASPATURIAN: It has its own internal logic.

SMITH: Yes. But it demands enormous effort to follow him. He is a great scholar; at the end of this work we were left with about half a dozen words that we just couldn't explain at all. Finally, we went to Paris and met him in his apartment.

ASPATURIAN: Ah, so you met the man!

SMITH: Oh, I met him several times. He actually autographed one of my books.

ASPATURIAN: Was he fluent in English as well?

SMITH: No. Not at all.

ASPATURIAN: So, he was not in a position to understand what you'd done with his poetry?

SMITH: No, but he was grateful for having them—there were a couple of previous Césaire translations, but we made those that reached the largest public. And we elucidated for the first time a large body of work that had remained impenetrable until then.

ASPATURIAN: How well is he known in the African-American community? Do you know?

SMITH: Césaire? Oh, *famous*!

ASPATURIAN: Is he?

SMITH: An icon.

ASPATURIAN: Really?

SMITH: Yes. Toni Morrison, Derek Walcott, Maya Angelou, Percival Everett—you can name any name and they'd revere him; the black American writers were—

ASPATURIAN: And it's your translations on which they rely?

SMITH: I don't know what type of contact they have with his writing. Certainly some of it must be through our translations.

ASPATURIAN: Presumably they have read him.

SMITH: But they *all* refer to him—the Caribbeans, the Africans, the Americans. As he himself was very influenced by the Harlem group in his youth.

So I was going to tell you a little anecdote from when we met him in Paris. One of the words we couldn't understand was *tipoyeur* in "High Noon." And Césaire looked in his library, and from a dark little corner he got a tiny, very worn-out book. It was a dictionary of, possibly, Portuguese; and he read to us that the word "tipoy" is a word used in parts of Africa for the sedan chair in which native Africans transported the colonizers. He coined *tipoyeur* to characterize the work that the blacks used to do. It was so scholarly to remember this little dictionary, to pull it out of the huge library he had, which really was the only luxury, because his apartment was extremely modest. Even the artwork—he had African artwork—was very modest.

So what happened with Clayton is that the collaboration was very cordial for many years, but more and more I realized that I was providing most of the substance of the books. When we were about to write the preface for *The Collected Poetry*, I told Clayton, "Let me see another preface that you wrote." So he brought me his preface to, I think, his translation of the poetry of [César] Vallejo, and it starts with a meditation in front of his wife's little blue panties that are on the back of a chair. And when I saw that I hastily said, "I'll take care of the introduction." [Laughter] He actually contributed relatively little to the introduction, but his short presentation of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* is powerful.

ASPATURIAN: Where was he based? Was he a professor somewhere?

SMITH: He was in California then, and then at Caltech [as a Dreyfus Visiting Professor] for a few years. But what happened between us is that, after our book came out, a woman wrote a book on Césaire, and quoting the introduction, she constantly said, "as Eshleman writes blah, blah, blah"; "according to Eshleman blah, blah, blah, blah"—you know, several pages of things I had written. My name never appeared. It was very irritating, and re-occurred in one form or another more and more with time. About ten or so years ago, we translated an isolated poem

called "Laughable" Eshleman meant for a journal. I did all the work and I pointed out to him that Césaire was presenting himself in it as a ridiculous impotent Prometheus and so on; and of course, he hadn't seen any of that. I said, "Would you let me sign this one alone?" And he said, "No."

ASPATURIAN: That was the end of the collaboration.

SMITH: That was the end of the collaboration.

ASPATURIAN: Did his name appear first on every book?

SMITH: Well, that was because of the alphabetical order. He was very fair about the matter of royalties. He's not a bad guy. But he has a huge ego, and he didn't have what it takes to work on Césaire, like a basic knowledge of linguistics, and the knowledge of classical languages and literatures, including French. The proof is that at the beginning of our collaboration, a woman, who was working on a book representative of all of Césaire, applied for an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grant along with Derek Walcott, the Caribbean playwright, and recruited us for the poetry part of the proposal. For some reason, she did not ask us to provide translations but used translations that Clayton had published in various journals long before meeting me. She and Walcott got the grant, but Eshleman and I were eliminated from it because the jury said those translations were ludicrous. I agreed with the jury. Still, nothing to do but reapply a year later with our own translations and this time we got the grant. So, obviously he needed me. Well, anyway, so we are no longer collaborating. He got together with James Arnold, a Césaire critic, at the University of Virginia, and they published, or republished, a collection of poems, *Soleil Cou Coupé—Solar Throat Slashed*—with Wesleyan University Press.

On my side, in the fall 2009, the University of California asked me if I would accept to do a complete Césaire, including all his later works. To make a long story short, I said, "Yes," and Eshleman would have been part of that at the beginning, but he withdrew. We had a signed agreement, and I translated eighty-five poems, and then they decided that they couldn't get the rights to several of the works so they wouldn't do the book. But they let it ride for two years without telling me, and during that time they could have bought at least part of the rights from the French publisher. So maybe they were out of money, and, ironically enough, part of the

work whose rights they were refused had been translated by Eshleman and me in another edition published by University of Virginia Press. I'm now working with a UCLA colleague, a distinguished young Africanist, Dominic Thomas, on publishing late poems of Césaire that haven't been published yet. The manuscript for that book is with Northwestern University Press now. But I wanted to read you three of those new poems. They are the ones that would go into this new book. Let's see. One is from *Solar Throat Slashed*.

ASPATURIAN: And when was it written?

SMITH: I do not know, but published in 1994. But it was one of several that was left out of an original collection. So it's called "Lynch 1." [Reading] "Why does the spring grab me by the throat? what does it want from me? even if it were to demand more spears and flags! I boo you spring for displaying your one blind eye and your foul breath. Your stupration your vile embraces. With patches of jungle (fanfare of advancing saps) your peacock tail fans out rapping tables but my liver is more acid and my venenific power stronger than your maleficence. Lynch is six o'clock in the evening in the oozing bayous it is a black kerchief waved atop the mast of a pirate ship it is the point at which the nail is strangulated by carmine insertion it is the pampa it is the queen's ballet it is scientific sagacity it is the unforgettable coit. O lynch salt mercury and antimony! Lynch is the blue smile of a dragon at war with angels lynch is an orchid too beautiful to bear fruit lynch is a mere preamble lynch is the wind's hands slaughtering of forest whose trees are gallnuts brandishing the raw flames of their castrated phalluses, lynch is a hand dusted with the powder of precious stones, lynch is a release of humming birds, lynch is a lapsus, lynch is a trumpet call a gramophone's cracked record a cyclone's tail whose train is carried by pink-beaked rapacious birds. Lynch is a lush chevelure which fear brushes back over my face lynch is a temple destroyed by roots and girthed by the virgin forest. O lynch lovable companion beautiful spurted eyes wide open mouth mute save when a branle fills it with a delirious snot on your loom, lightning, weave to perfection a continent bursting into islands an oracle sliding into centipedal contortion a moon that posts in the breech the sulfur butterfly rising in the scanty loophole of my murdered hearing."

ASPATURIAN: That's interesting. At one level he's talking about the voluptuousness of violence, isn't he? That's not all of it, of course.

SMITH: No, but that's part of it. Focus on the last three lines to see that violence gives birth to beautiful islands. The other one is from his last collection, which is called *Like a Misunderstood Salvation* [*Comme un malentendu du salut*]. It's a totally different tone, you'll see. This is the title: "The Sleeping Woman Rock. Or Beautiful Like the Exasperation of the Cessation." The poet is talking to a favorite spot in the landscape. [Reading] "Survivor survivor/It is you, the fallout/From some feasting of volcanoes/From a whirling of fireflies/From a flare of flowers a furor of dreams./So pure away from all that jungle/The tow of your hair lit up/To the very bottom of the solar barque/ Exasperation of the secession./From time to time, through the clearing/Sand mist/Through the sky's scarified games/I see her batting her eyes/Just to let me know she understands my signals/Which are moreover in distress about the fallings of a very ancient sun./As for hers I am alone I believe in still intercepting them/More than once I encouraged the wave/To cross a space persistent between us/But the dragon steers the course of this forbidden water/Even if it is often as a harmless turtle/That it comes up for air on the doomed surface./So what sacrificial bird should I send you to-day./Survivor, survivor/You my exile and queen of this rubble/ Ghost forever inept at completing her kingdom."

One more, if we have a little time?

ASPATURIAN: I think we do.

SMITH: This is the last poem of his collection. It is dedicated to Jacqueline Leiner, an academic woman who very much promoted his career. It's called "Configurations." [Reading] "Murmur of musty mangle smells/of splintered husks/of airborne seeds./Murmur of anchor-deep seeds so clever/at plotting the torture of a land./(and too bad for those who do not understand/the forever challenging gravity of this game/of drifting and groundings.)/Beacons we are told condescendingly provided/gallop of all startled beasts/rushed from the beginning of the ages/ the tongue of fire/the word/the exasperated benevolent asp of tender human milk."

ASPATURIAN: You have translated and written a great deal. I just wondered out of your extensive series of publications if there were one or two that you particularly enjoyed working on? Do you have favorites?

SMITH: I'll have to quickly look at my curriculum vitae to remember them. [Laughter] I

brought a copy. Let's see. I liked very much working on this article about *Césaire au féminin,* to find the traces of feminine language in his poetry. I extended the concept of "the other" to "the other sex." I worked on women also, as you can see. I worked on Caroline Marbouty, the woman who was Balzac's muse, at least that's what she called herself—mistress and probably his ghost writer off and on. I wrote more than one article on Valérie de Gasperin, a woman from an aristocratic Protestant family who was the leader of the anti-colonial movement in Paris in the second part of the nineteenth century. Nobody knows her today, but she writes like an angel. I published that in a very big French journal on nineteenth-century studies, *Romantisme,* apropos of a conference. I remember that a very big guru and pope of Romantic studies was doubtful about my bringing up Gasparin. He had never heard of her, of course, and said, What could you do with that? But at the end he said, "Well, she really pulled it off." I like that article very much — "Madame Agénor de Gasparin ou les délices de la chaire." There's a pun in "chaire"—it could be the delights of the pulpit—the church—instead of the delights of the flesh. [Laughter] I also wrote an article on her translation of Frederick Douglass's biography.

ASPATURIAN: Is she more studied today now that you have sort of brought her to light?

SMITH: I have no idea. I didn't follow up on her. I hope, yes. So that's one I like very much. I wrote an article for *French Forum* on a not-so-very-well-known novel of Balzac called *La Muse du Département*, (The Department's Muse). It's about a provincial woman married to a horrible, old, very materialistic bourgeois. She likes to lionize famous or supposedly famous people in her *salon*, and at some point she leaves with a lover, goes to Paris and becomes—well, the lover never succeeds as an actor or journalist, and she actually supports him by her own work. I wrote it to challenge the theory that Balzac has always been a champion of the capitalistic and the patriarchal, because she ends, you know, by being totally matriarchal herself, creating a matriarchy that revolves around her, having children from various men; and even her husband, who refers to them as "our children," ends by accepting it.

And I love that article. It's called *A Boire et à manger dans l'écuelle de Dinah* — "To eat and drink from the plate of Dinah." I called it that because when she was the muse of the department, she used to say, "I'd rather have my plate empty than nothing in it." [Laughter]

ASPATURIAN: In other words, deliberately left empty.

SMITH: But also, "empty" rather than "nothing" was a very interesting, almost mathematical concept. In fact I did refer to a Swiss mathematician about that difference. A mathematician friend put me onto the works of Gottlob Frege, whose logic like that of Balzac's heroine ends in a paradox.

ASPATURIAN: What you just said makes me think of this: Do you think the fact that you were working at an institution primarily devoted to science and engineering and technology had any impact on your choice of subject matter or on some of the interpretations you brought to it?

SMITH: No. I don't think so. I think even without Caltech I would have gone on to Gobineau and my other work. After all, I was the daughter of a scientist. I presented a talk on Madame Marbouty ["The Thousand and One Positions of Mme Marbouty: Sociomechanics of a Woman Writer under the July Monarchy"] to a Humanities faculty lunch and at the end, Morgan Kousser, whom I like very much, said "But what do you expect to do? You want to put these women in the canon?" I said, "Yes, but of course, a loose cannon!" [Laughter] No, I don't think Caltech made a difference there. What Caltech did, especially after I got tenure, is that they were marvelously protective with research money, time off—

ASPATURIAN: So your experience within the division has been a pretty good one.

SMITH: Oh, yes. It was a very good one, no matter what. I was a nothing lecturer for eleven years, but you know, they enriched my life so much. I am very, very, very grateful for that.

ASPATURIAN: Were you the only tenured professor of, one might say, comparative foreign language/literature ever at Caltech?

SMITH: No, there is a distinguished career comparatist, who is Oscar Mandel. I heard he requested that at least part of his oral history be published only after he death.

ASPATURIAN: I wanted to ask you about an issue that arose a few years ago when a long-time lecturer in Russian literature was let go, and it caused quite an outcry among the students. Do you recall—I can't remember the man's name.

SMITH: I vaguely remember that, but it was after I retired, which was seventeen years ago. While I was there, Valentina Lindholm was the renowned Russian language and literature teacher. I was supposed to be the coordinator of the language program after I got tenure, and all the lecturers were excellent. I never bothered them about anything.

ASPATURIAN: Was there anybody teaching German?

SMITH: Yes, there was a very good, brilliant young woman, but she left Caltech because she was ambitious. She wanted a tenure job. She's a successful lawyer now.

Then there were various people that didn't stay that long. But German for a long time now has been stabilized under the umbrella of Andreas Aebi, who is a very fine teacher. And in French I helped hire Christiane Orcel, who is also still there, and as far as I know does a very good job. What time is it?

ASPATURIAN: It's four forty.

SMITH: Oh, well, so we have time to finish today.

ASPATURIAN: I think we do.

ANNETTE J. SMITH

SESSION 6

December 11, 2010

ASPATURIAN: So we'll talk more about your Caltech life now. You wanted to speak more about the literature faculty.

SMITH: Yes. After Roger [Noll] left, David Grether [professor of economics] and John Ledyard [Davis Professor of Economics and Social Sciences] succeeded him as division chairs. This is the point where I felt that the foreign languages were beginning to decline. Not by our fault, but because the literature curriculum was becoming more and more specialized. The division was less and less a service division; and I thought it was a bit of a scandal because this was also a time when literary studies had been revolutionized by the French theoreticians like [Jacques] Derrida or [Roland] Barthes.

ASPATURIAN: I've never read them, but I recognize their names.

SMITH: Deconstructivism and so on. So I thought it was too bad that French literature was looked upon as not particularly important. Anyway, it was a period when the division hired a large number of young people, and many of them didn't last very long. I remember one in particular, who was supposed to be a great hope in the literature group. She left at the end of the year with a total nervous breakdown.

ASPATURIAN: What was her field?

SMITH: English literature. After her was Joyce Penn, who lasted several years. Then there was Wendy Weinstein. Did I say that right?

ASPATURIAN: Cindy Weinstein? She's still here.

SMITH: Cindy Weinstein. I just heard she is now executive officer for the Humanities. So the climate for a while was very tense. There was a couple named Rubin who were let go, and they resisted so much and wandered back to Caltech off and on. She was a talented literary critic and died prematurely. There was also a woman, Aimée Brown Price, who was in the history of art, and she was working on P. P. [Pierre Puvis] de Chavannes. Do you know him? He's a French late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century painter who painted large frescos. Actually, I'm not sure they're technically frescos, but they are mural paintings. A lot of official buildings in France like the Sorbonne are graced with the paintings of P. P. de Chavannes. Anyway, he's an important painter, but she could not advance the book very much so the division let her go, and she was so upset about it that they left California altogether. Her husband was a lawyer. They moved to New York, and eventually he became director of a big law center at Penn State or the University of Pennsylvania, I'm not sure. I didn't hear from her for a long, long time. Then a few months ago, when I was moving out of the house in Malibu, she phoned me because she has also an old family house on Paradise Cove near where I am. She said she would like to see me so much. She remembered me with such warmth because I had been one of the few people—she said—who'd been nice to her when she left. Actually, I didn't remember particularly being nice, but anyway. At first I said, "This is not a good day," because it was the end of a long moving day and I was exhausted. But she came with her husband, and we had a wonderful time, a wonderful reunion. [Laughter] We talked about lots of things. And what's nice is that about six months or a year ago, she finished her P. P. de Chavannes book. It was published by Yale University Press, along with a *catalogue raisonné*. She was reviewed all over America, and much in demand as a lecturer. It's one of the great coups I know of.

ASPATURIAN: How many years did it take her?

SMITH: Well, thirty years.

ASPATURIAN: Thirty years.

SMITH: Or thirty-five years. But anyway, it's the result that counts. Since then, we've been emailing regularly and with great pleasure, so I'm delighted to have rediscovered this friend.

And as a close friend of the Kevleses, she often conveys news of them. But to me that period at Caltech remains characterized by a large number of British imports.

ASPATURIAN: Who was responsible for that, do you think?

SMITH: Well, the first one, I don't know. But obviously after [Professor of Literature] John Sutherland was here, he had a lot to do with it. I could have done without it. I think that in exchange for the red carpet that Caltech deployed in front of them, they could have been at least courteous or participated in the division. And some of them were so dreadful. There was a little gnome—I forgot his name, but he was curator of the Bodleian Library [of the University of Oxford]. What can be more prestigious than that? But he was dreadful. He never taught anything. He never spoke to anyone. One day in the stairway, I asked him a professional question, and he said, "I don't know," and off he went. Very unpleasant. But one of them was, of course, Sutherland, and I'm very puzzled by him. You know him?

ASPATURIAN: I do, yes.

SMITH: Yes. Very puzzled by him because on one hand, he is, as you know, extremely charismatic, elegant, a great scholar, and very pleasant. And he was very, very nice, very kind, to David. But with *me*, there was one incident that separated us. We hired, unfortunately from a distance, a young professor of French. He was hired mostly because he went to the University of Birmingham, where David Lodge teaches, and David Lodge wrote an absolutely glorious—and unjustified—recommendation. Of course, then we were impressed, right.

ASPATURIAN: Lodge being a leading professor of French literature, I would guess.

SMITH: And of course a very famous novelist. You haven't read David Lodge? Well you should. He is so, so funny. He writes on the academic milieu. Such biting satire! Wonderful! He's also a friend of Sutherland. [John Sutherland, a Caltech professor for many years, is currently Emeritus Lord Northcliffe Professor of Modern English Literature at University College London. –*Ed.*]

ASPATURIAN: So this young man came in.

SMITH: So he came and met me in Paris. I must say, I was worried when I saw how he behaved. Well, once he was at Caltech as an instructor, he was such a dreadful teacher that he ended up having one lone student in his class—a language class, which is supposed to be fairly full. This little joker emitted a series of little papers, which were total shit, you know, but he could be sent to all kinds of conferences with these papers. He was never here! He was always traveling all over the world when he was supposed to be here teaching French One and Two. So at some point, when he was reviewed to continue, I said I opposed it and gave the various reasons I thought we should not keep him. Well, Sutherland, who in private, in the hallway, could actually not stop talking about how this guy was a little Machiavelli and how pitiful and so on—Sutherland took his defense very publicly and very forcefully. Maybe it was because he was a Britisher; maybe this guy had gone to Sutherland and begged for his support. But I thought it was very unpleasant, and from then I felt Sutherland's hostility to me in all faculty meetings, in all literature meetings. And as I said for Jenijoy La Belle, I think that there was a sexual component in that hostility. Eleanor Searle [medieval historian; the late Wasserman Professor of History] who was more like my age group and more established, complained to me about it as well. I was not a beautiful, young, strong woman. But I was an older, grayish, strong woman, and I think the ghosts of their mothers were breathing hard over those guys' shoulders. That's the way I explain it.

ASPATURIAN: Was this young man dismissed?

SMITH: He was let go but got another job.

ASPATURIAN: He was an Englishman who specialized in French literature?

SMITH: Well I don't know what he specialized in, mostly nineteenth century literature. But they were the kind of papers that a gifted high school junior might produce. I never understood why there was that hostility between Professor Sutherland and me. I quite liked him. He was very, very kind to David.

ASPATURIAN: Well, Sutherland, as he himself is the first to say, went through a period of severe alcoholism.

SMITH: Yes, that is another thing that puzzles me. Have you read his online book?

ASPATURIAN: No.

SMITH: It tells about his first semester at Caltech. And at the beginning he says that he went to Caltech because he thought he would have not very much to do in such a remote "colonial" institution, a scientific institution. Then he tells about these six months of total debauchery and actually with vague homosexual tinges to it—you know, in the cheapest bars of Los Angeles.

ASPATURIAN: The dives of Los Angeles.

SMITH: The dives of Los Angeles, yes. I don't know why he published that book. Maybe it was an exercise that the AA required of him or his psychoanalyst, but I thought it was not very nice for Caltech that one of its luminaries would make that picture public. Anyway he's a case that puzzled me. And something else that I want to talk about apropos of the faculty is that during the eighties and nineties, David and I began to write reviews for the *Los Angeles Times*. Eventually David was the poetry judge several times [The *L.A. Times* poetry award]. And after he died, I became judge of the fiction and first fiction categories. I say "the judge" because most of the panels were supposed to have three people, but usually the two others do nothing. This was particularly true of the editor of the book review for—what's the Greenwich Village paper called?

ASPATURIAN: *Village Voice*?

SMITH: The *Village Voice*. She was a joke. I received ten to fifteen novels a week for several years.

ASPATURIAN: Ten to fifteen!

SMITH: Yes, a week. And you know, after a while you develop the muscles to put them on the "no" pile after fifty pages. But I am extremely proud of the ones that I nominated for the prize, for the fiction and first fiction. [First fiction being an author's first work of fiction. *–Ed.*]

ASPATURIAN: How many years did you do this?

SMITH: Four perhaps. They don't have a first-fiction category anymore. But I nominated for the fiction prize David Malouf, the Australian writer, author of *Remembering Babylon*. And also William Boyd, who wrote a great book on Los Angeles called *The Blue Afternoon*. And then as a first prize in first fictions, I nominated Mark Behr, a South African writer, for his book *The Smell of Apples*, which is a little masterpiece—it has been published in translation in France with great success. It is now read in classes as a classic, and he has become a surrogate son, too. [See also Session 7] So this was a good period, doing something I enjoyed doing and I think did well—that distracted me from mourning David. And it's during that period that I become a closer and closer friend of Jack Miles. You know who he is?

ASPATURIAN: Yes, the former book editor of the *L.A. Times*.

SMITH: He was for a while, and before that he was the project editor on the first Césaire book, and that's how we met. We first had a non-meeting, which was funny because he had invited Clayton Eshleman and me to the UC Press building for lunch. We arrived, but he didn't come and finally his secretary phoned him and revealed he had completely forgotten. You know, when people are impolite I can be very violent, and I left, slamming all the doors and saying, "I don't take no shit from anyone and—" Two weeks after that, David and I barely survived El Niño in Malibu because the trailer that we were living in while we were building the house was demolished by the storm. We escaped one night with the dogs, a cat, and galleys of the Césaire book probably, to the house, which at least was already solid. It didn't have windows, but at least it had a roof. And so Jack phoned me and apologized. He said that he very much admired the book, and especially the preface, the introduction, which he considered a model introduction for a book like that, and would love to meet me if I would forgive him, and of course I did. In 1982, he came to the trailer, which was broken in two and partly hanging down, and we had a wonderful meeting; and he remained a very close friend. I don't know what else you know about

his career, but a few years ago he published two books both published by Knopf. One was called *God: A Biography*, and the other is about Jesus as the son of God [*Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God*]. The first one received an NBA [National Book Award] and a Pulitzer Prize and has been translated into something like nine languages; and he was invited to appear in Paris on Bernard Pivot's *Bouillon de Culture*, which was the most intellectual TV program in France. Well, he continues to publish. He is multilingual. He is general editor of the next *Norton Anthology* on the world's religions. He writes on various religions, including Islam. He's now a chaired professor at UCI [University of California, Irvine], and he teaches poetry and all kinds of subjects besides religion. He had taught at Caltech for a year or two [in the late 1990s, as a Mellon Professor –*Ed*.]. He was nominated by the students as the best professor of the year and was entertained by the president. Well, he would have liked to stay at Caltech, and the division acted so stupidly. Another historian who reviewed and reported on the application said that until the division had history of religion in its program, there was no room for Jack Miles.

ASPATURIAN: Who said this?

SMITH: It was Robert Rosenstone, but he may have been the spokesman, you know, of a group. He undoubtedly was. But it was such a short-sighted decision. I mean, Jack Miles is a giant—as a scholar, as a teacher, and as a human being. He is on the committee that selects the Guggenheim Foundation fellows. He publishes articles on politics and culture in the *New York Times*, *TLS* [*Times Literary Supplement*], the *Washington Post*. He's a great historian and analyst of cultures. So that was such a stupid, short-sighted decision.

ASPATURIAN: This decision was made inside the division? It never got beyond that?

SMITH: I think, but I'm not sure that it was made at the division level.

ASPATURIAN: Whom do you consider some of the more successful hires within the division?

SMITH: Of course, Jenijoy. She will be irreplaceable. She is unique, a force of nature and of the spirit. I don't know the young people well. We mentioned Cindy Weinstein. I must say, I have a mottled remembrance of her. After David died, because she was an Americanist, I called her

and I opened David's library to her and I said, "Take anything you want." She took an enormous quantity of books. Well, I didn't have any social contact with her, but a few months after that she said she wanted to give a party for me. Oh, I said, that will be nice. So, eventually, she sent me the date for the party, and I said, "Please not this date. That's the day my son is getting married." Well, she gave the party, and I never went. This is to say, I don't know her. She may be a good professor, but these young people tend to be self-centered. Mac Pigman is the last one, chronologically, I consider as my peer.

ASPATURIAN: What else?

SMITH: Oh, there's something else, which is that after David died—

ASPATURIAN: When was that?

SMITH: Nineteen ninety. August 31, 1990.

ASPATURIAN: And he had been ill with?

SMITH: He had been ill for four months. He had a pancreatic cancer. He went very fast.

ASPATURIAN: That must have been a very rough time.

SMITH: Oh, it was a torture. Because when they operated on him, they found that the scars from being wounded in the war were so bad that they could not reestablish a normal track for feeding. So he was fed by a hole in his belly. It went on for months and in great suffering. But that also was an exemplary death—a noble death, as you say. He was so brave.

ASPATURIAN: He was young.

SMITH: No, he was not young; he was sixty-eight. But he was not old. So just before he died, both of us had been invited to teach in Papeete at the French University of the Pacific. After he died, I didn't want to go. He died in August, and the semester started at the end of October. But

the dean there said, "You know, I am very sorry to say that we are now missing one professor and if you don't come that will be two and we will really be handicapped, so crippled by that. Would you consider coming?" So I went, for the winter of '90 and '91. Do you know anything about the Society Islands?

ASPATURIAN: No.

SMITH: Well, it's an archipelago in French Polynesia, which includes the Society Islands with Tahiti, Tuamotu Islands, Gambier Islands, the Austral Islands, and the Marquesas. It's not a colony; it's a French territory, which is a special status. They have some independence; still they're resentful against France because of the nuclear experiments that took place on the atolls. Well, I was well paid; otherwise life there is horribly expensive. And I was in a good hotel. The first year, I went with a lot of reservations, but it was wonderful to discover Polynesia. The university is similar to French universities in structure. And I was supposed to teach the nineteenth century. The second year, I taught Flaubert, the most negative of French writers, and some deconstructivism. I taught *Bouvard et Pécuchet* by Flaubert, which is a negation of all sciences and of knowledge. I taught that to fourth-year students who were very eager but also very unsophisticated. In exchange they taught me to snorkel better and to face small sharks without panicking.

ASPATURIAN: Seems like an even trade.

SMITH: *Mais non*, I was the winner, learning not to step over conches and not to eat the fish that gives Ciguatera food poisoning. They were so welcoming. I left with all kinds of presents. But something—you still have some energy for a little story?

ASPATURIAN: Of course.

SMITH: Something happened that was a very odd moment. I went to the Tuamotu, which is one of the atoll groups, several times. This time I went with a native *pension* owner who said that he was taking us to his kingdom. So we arrived at this island atoll, a beautiful, totally deserted paradise. We took along drinking water and rice and other than that we washed in the sea.

There was no electricity anywhere. We ate the fish that we caught and grilled it over open fires. I was there with a group of five jet-set, very young, beautiful Italian tourists and their guru, a dentist from Genoa who was more mature. I had taken with me the ashes—part of the ashes—of David, thinking, I'm sure he would have loved to go here, so I will disperse them here. I guess I had told the dentist that I had my husband's ashes with me. As we left the island around noon in an open boat, I was sitting in front. I waited until we went over the sand bar, and then I discreetly took out the little plastic bag and threw the ashes behind my shoulder, and then there was a huge laughter, and I turned around and the dentist was sitting on the prow. His face was all white like a New Guinea mask, and he was trying to clean his glasses with his finger so he could see again. [Laughter] And those were David's ashes. He probably had told all the group about them that because they were laughing and saying, "Le ceneri del marito." ["her husband's ashes"], something like that. And, you know I was devastated, but after a few seconds, I started laughing, too. I thought, "Oh, David. You were so unpredictable and adventurous, and now there you are, finishing on the glasses of a Genoan dentist!"

Anyway, I had more ashes. I went back for a second year, and during the second year I took a cruise to the Marquesas in one of the little freighters that delivers to these islands all they need because they are totally isolated. They are also isolated from village to village because the mountains are very high. The ships stop in every harbor, delivering goods on rafts, sometimes in very stormy seas. We hiked a lot. I saw Gauguin's tomb. Jacques Brel's I think is next to it. During that second year, finally, one day when I was watching the sunset on Moorea—which is always incredible every day—for the first time I felt the curtain of grief lift off my shoulders. I knew I could have a life again.

ASPATURIAN: Twenty years ago.

SMITH: Yes. So, that's the last chapter on my life. Something else that I wanted to say apropos of my work is that for a long time I always thought that I was zigzagging; but no, I was actually turning in circles. There was my family's colonial past, my father's anthropology on the Berbers—on the "other"—and there I was writing on writers who were polar opposites, but who in their own ways represented the "others" or meditated about the "other." A lot of the things I wrote, especially articles I wrote, went back to my thesis on matriarchy. Matriarchy may go

back to the fact that my mother was not very present and to the socialist streak in my family. So, you know, everything turns in circles. It's amazing. It's not zigzagging.

ASPATURIAN: I wanted to ask you a couple of things. How many languages do you speak?

SMITH: Oh, as you see, I speak English, not perfectly. I speak French perfectly. And I manage in Spanish well enough, for a tourist.

ASPATURIAN: And you also learned Latin and Greek.

SMITH: Oh, Latin and Greek, I had eleven years of Greek and thirteen of Latin.

ASPATURIAN: So you can read them?

SMITH: Oh, yes, I could, but you know, it's so, so long ago.

ASPATURIAN: The other thing I wondered is, leaving aside the authors on whom you've written, who are a couple of your favorite writers? Fiction or nonfiction.

SMITH: Oh. I wish you had asked me this question ahead of time because I could think about it. I read all the time, and I read very passionately. I love novels. I read a fair amount of poetry because I know a lot of poets, so I read their work. But I read mostly novels. Often I will read a book on culture or economics or history.

ASPATURIAN: When you were growing up, as a young woman, let us say, was there a particular novel or novelist or writer that you would say made an impression on you and somehow formed your thinking in certain respects?

SMITH: I read most of the French classics at an early age, and some great illustrated intelligent children's books that would be collectors' books now. The war saw to that.

Now, I read a lot of French literature. I loved Balzac; I absolutely adored Balzac. I love Flaubert, but, of course, right now, actually, I'm re-reading *Lost Illusions*. But those are not—

you are asking me about what I read for leisure. I am a fan of the great Australian writer Patrick White; I recommend *Voss* to anyone.

ASPATURIAN: Yes, but I was also asking about formative influences.

SMITH: That's a question I cannot answer off the top of my head. I come up with a blank. [See Session 7] But the last thing I wanted to say—unless you have another question?

ASPATURIAN: I don't think so. This has been a very comprehensive oral history.

SMITH: The last thing I wanted to say is that I was—I am—so grateful to Caltech. I might mention here that it seems that I am fascinated by great scientists. It's true. [Laughter] They just fascinate me. And the ones, the few I've known well, always didn't mind talking to me without condescension; and I sort of treasure that part of my life. I wrote down something. [Reading] "When I see the series of oral histories that speak so clearly of Caltech's long scientific fame and distinction, I am amazed at the extraordinary luck that befell me not only to coexist with, but also to have loved and been loved, by so many very, very smart people who never made me feel embarrassed to be among them."

ASPATURIAN: That's a very nice coda.

SMITH: And my last word is to thank the Humanities and Social Sciences Division—and Susan Davis especially—for making these interviews possible.

ASPATURIAN: So we have that on the record. Thank you, Professor Annette Smith.

SMITH: Thank you, too.

** Some material in this session was originally recorded during Interview Session 7.*

ANNETTE J. SMITH

SESSION 7

January 10, 2011

ASPATURIAN: This is interview number seven with Professor Annette Smith. Today we're going to talk about some things that you wanted to include in the oral history, and that we didn't have a chance to get to in the very compressed weekend of our first six sessions.

SMITH: I wanted to expand a little bit on my relationships with African writers who have meant a great deal to me.

ASPATURIAN: Sure.

SMITH: One of them is Azouz Begag. He's a Kabyle. You know, the Kabyle are a minority in North Africa, and they have lived mostly in the mountains. And they all were fierce warriors and contributed a lot to the Algerian war of independence. Even after independence they were never treated as first-class citizens by the Arabs, and they're very bitter about that. Because of my brother's life, and my father's past life too, I always felt very close to the Kabyles. So one of them, Azouz Begag, was a minister [delegate minister for equal opportunities] in the Villepin government. [Dominique de Villepin was prime minister of France, 2005–2007. *–Ed.*] And he had a long war with Sarkozy, who had chosen him as a special target, because Azouz's job was to protect the Maghreb minorities and the African minorities in the large French cities. He wrote a very funny book about his war with Sarkozy called *The Lamb in the Bathtub*. And I think that, in a way, those who laugh last have the last word, and that's what happened. Now he lives in Lyon, and he writes books and plays and movies. Last time I saw him, he was back from teaching at Wellesley. Recently, he went to New Caledonia, where he discovered that there were a large number of Kabyle deportees.

ASPATURIAN: In New Caledonia?

SMITH: Yes. It had a French penitentiary community for a long time—as did Algeria and Australia. He was amazed to discover that, but I knew about it because the writer on whom I'd done my thesis had written a fantastic play called *Les Canaques*, about the colonization of New Caledonia from 1850 to the 1870s.

Another friend from Africa whom I treasure very much is Mark Behr, who published a little book that has become a classic for universities. It's called *The Smell of Apples.* It's told through the eyes of a child who discovers, by a fluke, that his homosexual father is raping a young black boy. And this action served in the book as a parallel to the rape of colonization and also symbolizes the oppression of "the same"—you know, the black being actually a human being like the white.

ASPATURIAN: Is it a work of fiction, or is it a memoir?

SMITH: It's a work of fiction.

ASPATURIAN: What language did he write it in originally?

SMITH: English. Beautiful, beautiful, pure, clear prose. He's of Boer origin, from South Africa, and his first language was Afrikaans. In fact he first wrote the book in Afrikaans and translated it into English. He's a very interesting person because he's a homosexual—was from a teenager on—and absolutely terrorized by his father, who was a park ranger, you know, a he-man. Anyway, Mark is a very, very interesting writer, and I hope his fame will continue to grow. Also, something interesting about him is that he was in the South African Apartheid government. The government recruited him to spy on the radical students, and they blackmailed him to do that.

ASPATURIAN: I was just going to ask if that—

SMITH: Yes, that's how they got him. They told him that they would tell his family about his homosexuality if he did not serve. So he did. But he turned in the meantime, and became a double agent [laughter] as a very young man.

ASPATURIAN: Has he written about this?

SMITH: Yes, he did write his story and made a confession to the Commission for Reconciliation. There are writers there like [J. M.] Coetzee, whose latest book I am reading, and Breyten Breytenbach, who is one of the main poets and intellectuals, who went to prison for several years during all those events, who feel very ambivalent about Mark. They recognize he's a great writer, but it's too bad his past is a little—

ASPATURIAN: Compromised—

SMITH: Compromised, yes. Anyway, he got a job at Rhodes College in Tennessee. He's very happy now, as a tenured professor. He's somebody who is really important to me; that I had discovered—I think I mentioned that already—because I had given him the first fiction book prize for the *Los Angeles Times*.

I want to mention also another Kabyle writer, Boualem Sansal, who is immensely talented but marginalized by the present government.

You had asked before about writers I liked or who had influenced me. I would like to talk a bit more about the writers that I taught, but do you think we talked enough about that?

ASPATURIAN: I think we talked quite a bit about it. Flaubert was one whom you talked about. Camus was another.

SMITH: Perhaps. I also love [François] Rabelais very much. In his books you can watch the world—the Western world—going from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance with, for instance, the change that happens to the concept of time. But also, Rabelais foretells modernism in this wonderful episode called "the frozen words." Pantagruel or Gargantua and their companions hear a rumble in the air; and soon there is a shower of frozen words, falling from the sky on the ground. But they are impossible to decipher because they don't have any recognizable meaning, yet they are still beautiful to see, that's all. They pick them up and hold them in their hands, and that gives them joy. I think it's a wonderful symbol. I also like *The Princess of Clèves* very much.

ASPATURIAN: Who wrote that?

SMITH: Madame de La Fayette. It was written under Louis the Fourteenth, but it refers to the court of Henri the Second, in the Renaissance. I liked it because it's extremely—there's a great ritualization of eroticism in it, as well as of war and all the things that were part of the Middle Ages, but that were eliminated by Louis *Quatorze*. It ends with a strange choice, which you can discuss from a feminist point of view or other points of view. And I like Sade because I think he is a great libertarian and very funny. His heroine, the virtuous Justine, is raped, you know, in so many ways, through all apertures of her body. Eventually, she's found by a rich and noble sister, lives in her sister's castle, and everything is going very well. Then there is a big storm, and while she struggles to close her shutters, lightning strikes her and she dies in a kind of orgasmic convulsion. [Laughter] It's very funny that this woman who spends her life defending all her apertures ends by being knocked out as she's trying to close a last one. Connections like that are why I love literature.

Someone else that I didn't mention, and that I really want to mention, is apropos of publishing most of my work: I was assisted by an amazing person named Rosy Meiron.

ASPATURIAN: Oh, I know Rosy.

SMITH: You know Rosy? [Rosy Meiron worked for nearly five decades as a secretary/assistant in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences. *–Ed.*]

ASPATURIAN: Yes.

SMITH: She was born in Egypt and she could speak and write in an impressive number of languages.

ASPATURIAN: Seven, I think she told me at one time.

SMITH: Yes, more than anybody I know, perhaps with the exception of Michael Heim, who is a very famous translator. But she was an ultra-conscientious assistant and a lovely woman; and anyone who can put up with my terrible habits as a writer is a saint.

ASPATURIAN: She's [Professor of Applied Mathematics] Dan Meiron's mother, I believe.

SMITH: Yes, so that was another one of her gifts to Caltech! [Laughter]

Something else I wanted to mention is that by a thrilling coincidence, all the threads of my life are now physically reunited at the [Indiana University's] Lilly Library in Bloomington, Indiana. They were very eager to get my family's papers, and David's family's papers on the Norwegian side. And they also were kind enough to take my own papers as well. I just had dinner with the curator, Breon Mitchell. He was here for the new year to receive two prestigious translation prizes because he recently translated *The Tin Drum*.

ASPATURIAN: Ah, Günter Grass.

SMITH: Yes, a very much-admired new translation. He also translated Samuel Beckett. He's an extraordinary man. He was talking at the dinner—we were only five people, a small group—about the Lilly Library. Apparently librarians have a way of grading libraries, and Lilly is one of only five "A" libraries in the United States. They have a copy of the Bill of Rights annotated by George Washington. And then they have some very unexpected things like the largest, rarest collection of puzzles in the world. They have many movie star, cinema archives—Orson Welles, for instance—and a huge collection of Berber lexicons. It's just amazing to think that my whole background and my ancestors—my whole life—are contained there. To stay with the theory of pre-formation, which was pre-evolution theory in the eighteenth century—they called it *emboîtement*—it's also a bit ironic that my papers end there because some members of my family reproached me for having left France. And now some of my French family are there with me, in the same building and in Bloomington, of all places. [Laughter] So, I'm really very thrilled about that.

I didn't mention before the several [faculty] committees I was on: the Programs Committee, where I had the pleasure of working with Jerry Willis. The Foreign Students Committee, which didn't require much work. And on the most fun committee, the Admissions Committee. In those days, we went to the students' schools, and my territory was Washington and Oregon—terrific territory.

ASPATURIAN: How many years were you on the Admissions Committee? And when did you start?

SMITH: Three years. I think this was after David was no longer Master, because I came onto the faculty [i.e., became a professor] only in 1982. I would not have served before that time.

ASPATURIAN: You must have met some interesting candidates.

SMITH: Yes, but unlike David, who never forgot Louise Kirkbride, I don't remember the candidates I interviewed. I fought for them, but my voice didn't have much weight. Anyway, I hope and I know that they made it. David had other interesting territories that included the Mayo Clinic; and Ketchum, where Hemmingway had lived and killed himself.

ASPATURIAN: That's Idaho, I believe.

SMITH: Yes, that's in Idaho. And it was still very snowed-in when we were there. It must have been very early spring.

I also wanted to say a bit more about the Malibu house. It was twenty-one thrilling and exhausting months of hard work in 1980 and 1981. From day one, it became a landmark of Malibu. It was used for many, many films and photo shoots involving famous actors and designers. And photographer Herb Ritts photographed it a couple of times. I met Gianfranco Ferrè, who bought the Dior house. And a lot of celebs. But David enjoyed the house only ten years since he died in 1990. By then he had gone back to writing on Joseph Conrad, and as he was dying he was working on a coauthored book of essays; David wrote the introduction and contributed one essay and was the editor on *Under Western Eyes*. But he died before the book was in print; and it's Mac Pigman who very kindly took over and processed it to the press. I remember that David's article was based on the fact that in the *Under Western Eyes* manuscript, Conrad had regressed to his Polish name and signed very vehemently in the margins: "Korzeniowski."

ASPATURIAN: Yes, he rediscovered his Polish identity.

SMITH: And David made a point about that. When he died, he was at peace with the closing of the Baxter Gallery, the Master years, and so on.

ASPATURIAN: He had accomplished quite a lot.

SMITH: Yes. Yes, he had. But, you know, people forget sometimes. One must be philosophical about that; and actually it's one of the reasons I'm very glad to give these interviews. I just want to say that when I look over my twenty-seven years or so on the campus, I have the impression that the seventies and eighties were a very brilliant time for Caltech. But it's probably because I have less perspective on more recent years. And I hope, for Caltech, that every generation of faculty has the same impression—that they are living in a privileged era.

ASPATURIAN: That's nice.

SMITH: And probably they do.