

Title of sound file	Interview with Bill Foster
Name of narrator	Professor Bill Foster (BF)
Name of interviewer	Elizabeth (Liz) Frechette (LF)
Date of interview	06/17/08
Place of interview	NVCC Library
Transcription date	11/7/08
Transcriber's name	Elizabeth Frechette
Proofreading date	11/25/08
Proofreader's name	Elizabeth Frechette

LF

It's Tuesday June 17<sup>th</sup> and we're here today with Professor Bill Foster, who is a full time professor of English. Bill, we'd love it if you'd tell us a little bit about your background, growing up, your own educational goals and how you met them, and what decided you to choose education as your career.

BF

I think that's fairly straightforward. I grew up in West Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania. I grew up one of nine kids. My father, among the many jobs he held, because he was a hard-working individual, was a police officer. My mother also held a number of jobs. More often than not she worked as a domestic, cleaning the homes of wealthy white people in Philadelphia. But she had done everything. She drove a cab, she played the organ for funerals; she was never afraid to take a job if it meant providing for her family. I have six sisters and two brothers. I was the sixth out of nine.

I was always a reader, which my mother encouraged. I was a bit of a nerd, which I say proudly, that I was always interested in the acquisition of knowledge. It seemed I was accessible. I was never afraid to go to a library as a young man. Even though it was a little walk, I enjoyed the walk. I took out as many books as they allowed me to, as often as I could. Once I discovered a library card I went away. Then I started buying books, as a young man, and I had people who encouraged me in that as well.

When I was in junior high school I was approached by my guidance counselor - - out of our entire junior high only six or so individuals were approached - - about a new program, started by the Independent Talent Search Program, looking for minority students to get into a new program. I applied, we took a test, it was a battery of ... medical history, and you had to write up a personal letter, and you had to have recommendations of people in the community. I got all that. Then the test scores the first year got lost in the mail so only one person got accepted in the program of the six who originally applied. So I was discouraged by that but my parents were not. They said, "You will apply again." The second year I applied I got accepted again.

From that I went to high school in Massachusetts which was quite a journey. I had never really been away from my family. So I went 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

LF

So you were what, sixteen? Seventeen?

BF

Fifteen, fourteen, fifteen, in that age. Cause I was like a year ahead of most of the students in my class. They had spent a year in kindergarten; I went right to first grade.

LF

All that reading at the library.

BF

One can only hope. So I went to the Amherst Regional High School, in Amherst, Massachusetts, which was a whole different experience. I was from urban black Philadelphia. This was rural suburban, mostly white, *way* mostly white, upper-class and college-educated families. It was an interesting mix. College-educated because there were five colleges in the area. And farm families - - people who had been in the area for many years. So this was the high school I was in. We brought our - - myself and seven other guys from around the east coast. We all lived in one house; we had house parents, and a head of the program; we had families, quote-unquote, out in the communities, supported us. It was an eye-opening experience for me.

That had kind of started for me my last year of high school in Philadelphia, where I was meeting people who were not like me, and yeah, figured out pretty quickly, did you like somebody, did you not like somebody, for things they couldn't control? Like their skin color, or their religion, or their gender. That pretty much showed itself to be silly. It was kind of a primer for me, by the time I got to Amherst. Amherst still had its moments of adjustments. A lot of people weren't used to us at all.

LF

This was the sixties?

BF

Sixty-eight was the first year we went. So this year is actually the 40<sup>th</sup> year of the program.

LF

Oh, it's still going?

BF

Oh yeah!

LF

Are you an active participant?

BF

I am indeed. Fund-raising, I go back, share stories of the first years with the new students and their eyes are always as big as saucers because they have no idea what it was like. But we were pretty well prepared. Thank God. We had gone to a six-week program at Dartmouth College,

which intensified math and English, speed reading. They took us out every weekend. They were trying to prep us for the best in the country. And we were. Amherst Regional High School, if I recall, was in the top ten of public high schools at that time.

It was one of the very early public high schools and I liked that. Some students went to private schools and didn't do quite so well.

LF

How did your family adapt to that?

BF

I think it was tougher than they ever said. I think, like I said, to be away from home was a new thing for me. Only time I had ever gone, I'd gone with my family when we were on our trips together. So it was, first of all, this six and a half, seven weeks, to Dartmouth by myself, to New Hampshire. First time I'd ever been on a plane. Met guys from all over the country, met Eskimos, met Puerto Ricans, met poor whites. Poor white? There ain't no poor white people, what's wrong with you? And we shared experiences together. So we learned a lot. Then I made friends in Amherst who are still my friends now. My godparents, God rest them, are still alive. They were my godparents since the 70's. Still go to see them.

LF

Was this was a co-ed program?

BF

No. No it wasn't.

LF

Do you think there was an advantage to it not being co-ed, for you?

BF

Probably. A lot less distractions. The public school was a co-ed school but the program we were in was all a bunch of guys living in the house all the same age. I had come from a big family, but I'd never come from one with all my brothers the same age as I was. Each of us had different things we excelled at, we were proud of each other, this was the age of Black Power. We felt actualized; a lot of people were in the neighborhood. Being an academic town we had a lot of professors came by and talked with us, helped us out, kept our eyes open, people in town. It was important.

LF

You helped each other, you supported each other...

BF

Absolutely.

LF

... studied together...

BF

... and still do.

LF

And still do?

BF

Absolutely. Still in touch with several of the brothers. It's hard, over the years, but we make an effort. We try to pass that on to other young people as well.

LF

That's a very interesting story. Where did it take you?

BF

I got accepted into Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, which made my mother very happy because that was only an hour from Philadelphia. But I was like, [whispering] "I don't think so." At the last minute, literally the last minute, cause you know college acceptance is in May – I mean - March and April – I got accepted at a couple schools, I was deciding on Lincoln, it was the most prestigious of the schools I got accepted to, they were giving me a partial scholarship. But then in *August* I got accepted at the University of Massachusetts and they offered me just about a full work-study scholarship. So I said, "I think this is an easy decision." I knew the area, I knew families in the area, I said, "Yeah." So that's where I went.

It was great! It was a little funny. It was like going to high school in a way that, by the time, at end of academic school year, I was anxious to get back home and be with my family. But after a while you want to go back to school. So it was like, yeah, I'd been away to school literally since I was in high school so it wasn't that much of a shock that way, it wasn't like a lot of students who go away to school and it's like suddenly they just kind of lose their minds. I think I kind of had a level head pretty much by that point.

LF

You had reached the maturity aspect of being able to do things on your own...?

BF

and not so nervous to be out there by myself.

LF

... set your schedule ...

BF

But I had a number of people in my family, whenever I'd come home it was always a special occasion. My family made me feel very proud to be in college. Whenever I accomplished something I always let them know. I started writing for almost every publication from my high school; the same thing when I got to college, I didn't want to waste the opportunity. I think that's

what the education in my family was about, “Don’t waste the opportunity,” cause that was very important.

LF

You once said something that your grandmother used to say, to have your life stand for something.

BF

Oh God, yeah. She would say, ah, the example I use, I’m saying, “If you’re in a room with a chair, you’re both in there. You’re both taking up space. So why don’t we just give the chair a degree if all you’re here’s for is to take up space?” And I never forgot that, the idea is that you have a responsibility. That was even the unspoken message from many members of our family. “You have something to accomplish.” “You have something to do.” “You will always have our support.” Messages that turned out for me that not everybody had. I assumed everybody had that but I came to find out that quite a few people did not. Whether they succeeded or failed no one in their family seemed to care, which seemed really kind of strange to me, cause my family was never about that college represented some kind of elitist place where we didn’t want you to go cause Lord knows that’s going to change you into somebody else. That’s one thing my family never asked me whenever I came home: “Who do you think you are?” or “Why are you acting different?” My family never did. People who *knew* my family took that position. Man, that was always like, “Who do I *have* to be? Do I have to stay exactly the same as you? How about I should progress and be able to strive both those worlds?” A lesson I find I still have to give to my students today, surprisingly, forty years later.

LF

How many of your sisters and brothers went on to college?

BF

After I did? Quite a few, actually. Surprisingly. I had a sister older than me who went but only stayed four years. I was the first to graduate of our generation. Of our generations that came north. Of our families that stayed in the south, some of them were college-educated. But of the family that came north - and that was extended, quite - I was the first to graduate. They were immensely proud that day. I always got a sense that it was important.

There’s another reason why I didn’t waste time while I was on campus. If we’re speaking candidly? I had friends in college who got high, who drank, who chased the opposite sex. I would always wonder, “Where do you think you are?” I was always full of a little purpose. Not 100% of the time, but at least quite much more than they were. At least I knew where the library was and I used it. I didn’t feel like I could use racism as an excuse for not doing my work, which some people did. Speaking candidly. Which always kind of embarrassed me. “How are you going to say they hate black people when you haven’t done work? You went to the classroom at the beginning year. They weren’t going to make you do anything. They saw people they were using as an example. I figured like with anything, it’s a one-trick pony and once it runs out you’ve ruined it for anyone who comes behind us. You’ve used up all the scholarship money, because by the time my brother went to college there was nothing but loans left. It was only three years after I came. The Vietnam War was in full force; a lot of things were taking people out of

themselves. I was fortunate enough to have been able to stay pretty much on the path. I watch students who are easily diverted; I remember the nature of being young is that sometimes you are diverted. But then that's my job, to be a mentor and to try and bring them back. All I can do is tell you, you either you get it or you don't. It's out of concern and love, it's not about I'm stuck in one place and I can't imagine somebody going someplace else.

LF

Okay. So you're at UMass, Amherst and interest in majors...? What narrowed it down to education?

BF

Curiously enough it wasn't. I took a degree in Communications and Journalism. Media was a very big thing; it was changing the way we looked at the world and I very much wanted to be a part of it. I could have chosen a better school for better preparing me for that. UMass has antiquated television production facilities. They had better equipment at the high school. I had worked at the high school so I at least had an in. Public speaking? I was very excited about. My high school public speaking teacher was so good, and who had a state-wide reputation, that when I went to take Advanced Public Speaking at UMass I just mentioned her name and I got in. That was the pre-requisite. "You got the pre-requisite." I had people watching out for me, it made a big difference. I was thinking pre-law, I was thinking the military before the war started, but as a chaplain because I had had a very religious upbringing, but nope! That didn't happen.

Right after graduation, got married; my daughter was born shortly thereafter. I had to take a number of jobs in retail and then, a year and some months after I graduated, I got a corporate job which moved me and my family to Michigan. Was making more money than I had ever made in my life, had an expense account, had corporate travel, we rented a condo; life just changed dramatically. Was there for a number of years, four years? I think.

In 1980 came to *Weekly Reader* in Middletown, as a copywriter. Loved that. It was really kind of a breakthrough for me. I had been writing, for years, been writing in different aspects. I had written copy as a free-lancer for a number of years; I wrote newspaper articles; I just never moved away from it.

LF

The corporate training had writing as an element?

BF

While I was at *Weekly Reader* I had the opportunity to go to graduate school, at Wesleyan. "No, not that! Anything but that!" So I applied to their Graduate Liberal Studies program, and I got accepted. From '84 to '86, I was not messing around. The last semester was a bit rough.

LF

So you're full time work, you're full time school, full time dad, and family ...

BF

And writing plays, and writing poetry, and almost full time dead. But either you're doing it when it's needed to do, or you don't, and I was kind of for "Let's get it done." Other people had been going to graduate school over ten years and with no end in sight, and I'm like, "No! I'm not going to do this for ten years." Either take a class, flunk a class, it wasn't a big deal ... mañana we'll get them educated. I'm like, "No, I'm going to take advantage of this as much as I can." So I was done in two years. I started looking around. I was doing a few more corporate jobs and someone said, "There's an adjunct position at Waterbury, you could teach English." I said, "I could teach English, yes." From that, that's how I came to campus.

LF

Very interesting. So it wasn't necessarily a direct approach, it was a choice you made as a combination of other things.

BF

But I had always been an advocate for young people. Worked in programs that helped promote them, and education was always was something I was very serious about. So it was for me a very natural turn. After about close to 20 years working in business, education was my second career, surprisingly, but not that hard a transition. I saw the possibilities. Now I'm designing classes, teaching classes, approaching students on a number of levels. Trying to be the best of all the best teachers I ever had, and not the worst. Because we remember both.

LF

You have a particular - every student I've ever talked to who has taken a class of yours has just praised you to the heavens - you have a particular reputation as being someone who gets the course content across in a way that's enjoyable, and yet you're tough. Did you start out that way or did it evolve?

BF

It's funny. As I look back on - cause I keep everything - as I look back on some of the first tests I did, I was a lot tougher. First starting, I was real rough on them. Because I thought it was necessary; I didn't want anyone to ever have someone question their credentials. "Oh, didn't you go to a *junior* college?" - whatever the hell that is. I say, "You know what? If you do well in this class I want you to be able to go anywhere, and *dare* anybody to question your credentials. That's why I'm on you." I explain at the beginning of each semester, "This is not an easy class. This is not a gut, this is not a walk-through, this is not a sleep-through. Either you're coming in here to do the work or you need to go to someplace else. I don't say it because I'm angry, I'm saying it because it's real. Better you should know up front than be unpleasantly - -and I don't want to say this, surprise - shocked - several tests into the semester, having to realize that, you know, you're just on a roller coaster and it's going fast. We only have so much time, we have certain things to cover. Be a part of it."

The second thing that my best teachers did, my teachers surprised me. Cause they were amiable, so you figure, "Amiable, shoot. I'll be able to just walk through." No! But then they were tough. I had teachers that would - my teacher who taught me black drama was also the director of African American rep at UMass - and she would say - we'd be in rehearsal - and she'd say,

“We’re going to be here til you’re done.” And it would be 4 o’clock in the morning. The class with her would be at 9. So ... now she knew where you were, but she knew where you’d better be. Either you’re here cause you’re serious or you’re not. If you’re not, don’t waste the money, don’t waste the time, and don’t get mad at the end of the semester cause it’s somebody else’s fault. Take primary responsibility for what you want. Be self-actualized. So much in the world you have no control over, but this you do.

It’s not about impressing me, cause I have students who - although I tell them that it’s not important - still, it’s grinning in my face all semester and as soon as the class is over never hear from them again, walk right past me in the hallway. I say, “You know I’ve never required that from you. This is not about attention on me, it’s attention on what you learn.”

The secret, if there is a secret, and there’s not, really - is that this is not really about the class you’re taking, it’s about how well you do in an organized system. How do you learn that there are tools you can access? “How many of you have been to the library? How many of you really know how to use a computer, other than word processing? I don’t mean playing video games, because hey, my godson does that and he did it without reading instructions. I know you know how to use a phone. You know what the rules of the class are. I can’t hear, ‘I couldn’t get in touch with you Professor Foster.’ You have any number of conduits. As much as I see you guys on cell phones? Shut up! Freakin’ grow up!”

The best thing about teaching college - and I do love it, because I taught high school for about five minutes and I quit just in time before I started strangling them - but they’re just young. They think they’re invulnerable. They think they’re going to live forever. They think that nothing they do today is going to affect them tomorrow, as much as I did. But it’s not true, and it’s very painful seeing students just taking, really unnecessary risks.

LF

Is that your biggest challenge? Or what would you say was your biggest challenge?

BF

Getting them to have an appreciation that this is for real. When I first came here, you were asking me earlier about what changes I’ve seen over the years of teaching. There used to be a wider age range, a much wider age range. Which was why I used to love to teach at night. Because the students - after a certain hour when classes started - people coming from jobs, and have families - they were serious. Was nobody coming here to play. Everybody came here to get the grade. Some of the students here, fresh out of high school, some of them *not* fresh out of high school, still not serious. Can happen. I can’t imagine how but it still happens. I let them know early enough on. “You know what? Either you straighten up or I can’t help you. As the semester gets older you need to have an appreciation of something, and I’m going to give you some insight to me as a professor. I’m going to be a much nicer guy at the beginning of the semester than I am at the end. Because at the end, I’ve got to deal with a lot of begging. It’s a psychic draw. I have no sympathy for begging. If you’re a skater, you’re barely here, you’re easing into class late, you always have a reason to be out of here early, you’re missing classes because of doctor’s appointments when you know we have important stuff to cover. Every once in a while I still get students who ask me stupid questions - and while I tell them there are no such things as



stupid questions, there are. “Is this going to be on the test?” “Nope! Just covering it because it makes me feel good ... *Yes* it’s going to be on the test! And because you asked that question the test just got harder.”

And don’t come to my class if you haven’t read the assignment. “Who are you trying to fool? That’s an embarrassment to you, to your classmates, and finally to me. It doesn’t start with me, it starts with you. This is a waste of your time. You bitched and moaned about the cost of the textbook which you don’t even use! What do you, hold up the couch with it because the leg broke? Use it! It cost you something, then get your money’s worth. The same thing in this class. If you don’t think I’m responding to you right away, come see me. Ask me, talk to me. If I’m not giving you a response, go to my boss. That’s the job, that’s the system. Learn how the system works. Everybody has a boss. I’m not mad at you, I’m going to be trying to be responsive to you. It’s not like, “Oh Professor Foster I’ll come by your office,” and I never see you, then you didn’t do your job. What’s your job? Find out what it is. My job is to, you know, if I’ve got to trick you, if I’ve got to keep you awake nights? “Ooh, I’ve got so much homework to do!” Oh boo-hoo! Let me see you, while you’re eating pizza, while you’re watching TV, while you’re on your cell phone, while you’re writing a note to somebody - yeah, I can see how your life is just so full. “Darn it! Here, take this A and get out of here, you crazy noogiehead.” No!

Love them to pieces. Love them. I say, “If you ever get the feeling that I’ve something in here besides me loving you guys, tell me. I love you guys. I’m your number one advocate. You are my heroes and heroines. You are, on the face of it, of everything else in your life you’ve decided you want an education. Now it wasn’t that you decided that you wanted to pay the price for what the cost you; is something else. But you wanted to go back to school. I don’t even have to be in your lives, I don’t have to know anything else about you. Let me guess. Do you have people who are pulling on you, making fun of you - ‘Who do you think you are, you trying to be better than us’ - okay? Then check their lives out at the end of one semester and see if they are any further along than you are, and decide whether or not this is important to you or not.

I’ve had students who tell me - and I gauge this cause everybody has family - “I wasn’t here because my grandmother was sick.” If that’s true, that’s very unfortunate. If it’s not, you just wasted an opportunity. I had a student whose mother was passing away. She said, “I’m going to have to quit this semester, I’m making a decision.” I said, “Then you’ve made a good choice, I think; school will be here. As much as I want to keep you in class.” - because she was my A student, A. Came in with a serious attitude. “Do the things that are finite, the infinite will take care of itself.” Mother’s only going to be alive for a short time. Which is going to make you feel better, having spent time with her every day on her last days, or being in the class? I know you’re going to come back as strong as you left.” And she did.

We have students here who think it’s extended high school. Literally. I’ve had students walk into my class, up to the middle of the semester, never brought a textbook.

LF

How long have you been here, fifteen years?

BF

Since 1992.

LF

Sixteen years. Have you seen a change in the pattern of the way students behave, the way they study? Anything different over the years?

BF

I think that the requirement to be computer literate is much more of a requirement. I see students who still don't want to do that I've had students at the beginning of the semester - but then I think that might just require us to get some kind of coordination with the high school teachers and tell them that this is what we're looking for by the time they get to see us. This is no different from a four year college, really, in my mind. If it was, trust me, I'd be wearing Bermuda shorts every day. I wear a shirt and tie every day to class; this is to give my students a hint that this is a serious commitment for me whether it's one for you or not.

But yeah, that some students don't want to take that seriously: "Oh, I don't know how to type." I'd learn. No sympathy. You had to have an appreciation that that was a requirement if you were to go to college. Name a job where you don't have to learn how to type. Any job. Even if you're an auto mechanic you have to know how to type.

Grammar. I'm on them on. I don't want to hear I don't know that. I can't. There's a certain frustration on my part, from some of the students. They're not going to make it. This first semester, not in my class. Cause their attitude is not, or their skills are not, up to par. I understand the philosophy of trying to give everybody an education. But I also understand that they need to be prepared before they get here. You can't come - it's like me going into a restaurant in my underwear. Come on. You know what the requirement was before you stepped in the door. You can't pretend like you didn't know, like they owe you. No, we owe each other. I'm going to bring you my best, bring me your best. If you're not ready, there're ways to get ready.

But, oh. "My mother..." I saw it in business, I saw grown people, "My wife says I shouldn't come to work today." "Fine. When your paycheck has less one day's pay in it, ask your wife how she feels." That wasn't said to be funny, that was actually to be direct. The same people who did that were the same people who, if there was a penny less from their paycheck they had a problem. You come in late, you barely do your responsibilities, you always have an excuse to leave early, you're not really here. How am I not supposed to see that?"

LF

So things haven't really changed with the students?

BF

No. Students are the same.

LF

How about the campus, how about the school? I wasn't here 16 years ago, I don't know what it was like. When you came here were we on this campus already?

BF

They were just combining the community colleges and the technical colleges. Maybe a year, maybe less, after I got here. As a new employee I didn't have a lot of problems with that but there were people who had been here for years and they were a tad upset. There are people who are still upset, sixteen years later.

LF

The buildings were in place, or they were being built?

BF

No, every building was here. Except obviously the new one. The Quonset huts of course were over there. Which, God, was that post-World War II? It was time for them to go.

What we teach, and how we deal with the students, and the number of activities the students are involved in, and the level of community service - a lot of things have gotten more formalized. More procedures coming down from the community college system. The union taking a more active role. The world has changed a lot. Not all good, and not all bad. It's changed. I think it's the same thing I'm teaching my students; it's what people here who teach here have to be aware of. It's about adaptability. If you don't like it - I don't get - I'm not mad - it's like being mad at the cop. Why would I be mad at him when the cop didn't make the law? Cops just enforce the law. If I don't like it, then I get involved in the making of the law.

Same thing here. Which is why we have a faculty senate, because people don't feel that they were being appreciated enough for their rules and certain decisions here. And that's exactly how it should go. I think that there was a different approach in the quote-unquote old days before I got here. I think that personal power mattered more than the systematic power and I think that's changed over.

LF

And you think that's a change for the better?

BF

I absolutely do. Given a choice, if I had a choice between somebody on their whim as opposed to a written policy, I'd take a written policy every time. "On your whim" changes in a second. An example: we were discussing sexual harassment in Communications class. I told the students a story. I had a friend who said, "Sexual harassment is what I say it is." And I said, "You know, that makes me nervous. Because you'll change that at your whim. Which means today if I say hello it's not sexual harassment and tomorrow if I say hello the exact same way, the exact same circumstance, suddenly I'm harassing you." If I have a policy that addresses that, now I feel we're both protected. So yeah, I think, systematic. As long as they put it in and they make some sense. There's always going to be some nonsensical in terms of my concern; it's duplication of effort. Worst case scenario somebody has to prove or they're out of a job. The best case scenario,

where people with good conscience are involved, I never have a problem and if I do, I'll find the conduit to register it.

LF

It sounds as if you feel that the individual is still an important aspect of the overall goings-on.

BF

And the day that they're not is the day we lose the heart, and I think we lose the purpose, of the college.

LF

We've found a balance, in some way.

BF

Absolutely. But if I've ever been that way, I mean, I've worked with people here who forget that the third word in the title of our college is community. They like to play gatekeeper, they're kind of elitist. "We are academicians; we are this, that, and the other." Yeah! I'm real impressed with that. Excuse me while I try and stifle y'all, okay? The only difference between you and the people who are coming here is that you have some letters behind your name. You are essentially the same. No one is that far above the people we teach. If you think that, then maybe you need to be someplace else. I'm always straightforward about that. I don't hide that from anybody. All my life I've met people who came from much humbler beginnings than me, that when they got some place, that's what it was about. It wasn't about helping people, it was about impressing people. Nah. Who cares if you're impressed? Cause you might be impressed with me one day and not be impressed with me tomorrow.

LF

Well, one of the things that I am impressed with about you is how much you actually are able to get done, in terms of, you teach here, you're the advisor to the Journalism Club, you have a number of books that have been published; could you talk a little about your outside interests? I know you play music as well.

BF

The journalism was a surprising thing because they came to me and said, "You're the only person we have on staff who has a journalism degree." I said, "Well I guess that makes sense that I should teach that." But I love that. It also gives me insight into activities going on around the campus. I'm a comic book historian and I teach The Graphic Novel as Literature class which gives me a chance to bring that to my students. I love that.

Publishing? I've always done that, literally, from the time I was very young.

And writing, so having a conduit to that, and encouraging my students to find that conduit, is very important.

Diversity training; I came upon that quite by surprise, in 1995. I met some people from the Anti-Defamation League and started working with them and still do to this day. Love it. Primarily

working with high-school kids. Which is probably, as a specialist probably the only way I could do it cause, day-to-day ... I give big props to teachers, and counselors, and administrators.

And Martial Arts which has been an interest of mine since I was in my twenties. They were able to bring that here, and have a well-established club and class. I love that. And to watch my students get empowered by it, I love that as well.

LF

Are you one of those people who only has to sleep for two hours a night?

BF

No. God, no.

LF

But you manage to find a good balance. Do you have to stick to a schedule?

BF

I wish I could be more systematic at it. In my mind I'm not very disciplined. I think I'd like to be a lot more disciplined in terms of, I'm going to five hours for the entire week. But no, I'm a deadline guy. I have to give myself a deadline and then try to stick to it. Cause if it's just kind of amorphous that's exactly what happens, I'm just kind of floating.

LF

So you fill up every minute with as much effort as you can.

BF

Well, no one is going to be a tougher person on a deadline on me than I am, so that's very much where I go. I have a piece I've been trying to finish off since February that I promised a friend of mine. I'm trying to get that done in the next couple of weeks. That's a rare thing for me but I find that if an opportunity comes up I want to try and take advantage of it. But I've also learned how to move back from stuff too cause you can't do everything, you can't be everywhere. Everybody's got a request but sometimes it's just not worth it to fulfill it.

LF

What do you see for the future for Bill Foster?

BF

It's funny. I have a friend who worked at Yale University. He was the head of undergraduate drama. That's fairly prestigious. He left the job! He was offered another job at a fine arts center; brand new, substantial pay raise. But he had the sense that it wasn't what he wanted. It wasn't about the money, it wasn't about the prestige, it was about he had some stuff he wanted to do. So he now writes full time, which I think is amazing. He and I have been talking about writing projects for a while and he said, "You know what? I give you five years before you come to the same conclusion." He said, "You'll get tired of students coming to your door with the same nonsensical requests. You'll get tired of administrators working your last nerve over things that they know the answer to. It's that eventually you'll reach the point where your own schedule,

and your own time, and your own projects'll be more important to you." I said, "Ahh, I don't know, man. We'll see."

LF

There's certainly an energy that you get from teaching.

BF

Oh, God yeah.

LF

That fuels some of the other projects, maybe.

BF

And my students are a constant sense of ... they make me laugh, they truly make me laugh. And I think that's where we get some of the most important interchanges where you realize that, you know what? And I think maybe this is one of the most important things I can actually teach people I've worked with is that we can respect each other as professionals, we can get our jobs done, and we can still at the end of the day have a smile on our face and if you don't, that's really sad.

So I'm just determined I'm going to do that and the day that that's not happening it's time to quit. It's not a time to blame somebody else for your lot in life. I didn't fall into teaching, I came to teaching, I was fortunate. It was not my primary thing but it's become one of the primary things I do. As I tell my students, I'm not here by accident. I'm not here because I can't do anything else. Because I love this. And you don't have to love it as long as I do, but maybe I can make you hate it a little less.

LF

Bill, I want to thank you for coming in. If we want to revisit some of the issues that came up today, can we do that?

BF

Absolutely.