Winter 2-2016

Vicki Shafer Interview: 35 years of Teaching English and Latin in Dallas Area Secondary Schools

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ES: So, I guess the first question was where did you grow up. So did you grow up in Texas, or?
VS: I grew up in Wichita Falls.
ES: Ok, and, where is that exactly?
VS: That’s, it’s in north, very north-central Texas off toward the west, it’s about 14 miles from the Oklahoma border.
ES: Ok, so that’s why I’ve seen it, because when I drive up to Oklahoma to see my dad. Yeah.
VS: Ok, yeah you probably go through it. Where does he live?
ES: He lives in Norman, so we take 35.
VS: Oh, ok, well you actually-you cut over, yeah. You have to cut over to the west then. Ok.
ES: So we see the signs for it. Yeah. Ok.
VS: So, yeah, I grew up there—I was born there, and I grew up there.
ES: Alright.
VS: Went to high school. There was only one high school. —
ES: Oh! Ok.
VS: —Wichita Falls High School.
ES: [laugh] Right-ok, that makes it easy, it’s a small school—I mean small town, small school.
VS: Well, it’s a huge--small town with a huge school, because when I was there it was the only high school, so they had to split up their football team. It’s medium small, it’s about 100,000 (people).
ES: Ok. So then where did you go to college?
VS: UT Austin.
ES: Oh, Ok. And how did you find the difference between the small town to Austin, then?
VS: Well, at first it was difficult. (The thing that made it)—and I was homesick for about 6 months. Then when I came back the second semester of my freshman year I realized that Austin was a lot more fun place to live than Wichita Falls.
ES: [laughs] That’s what I’ve heard! Austin’s cool. [laugh]
VS: —And then I loved it, I loved it after that. I really did love Austin.
ES: Yeah.
VS: And uh, so I got my bachelors there, —
ES: Ok.
VS: — and my teaching certificate, and I did all my education courses there. Uh —
ES: And did you do them, so you like have a 4 year bachelors and then you did your education certification at the same time?
VS: Yeah, my degree was not in education. My degree was in Liberal Arts.
ES: Ok, ok,
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VS: I had, actually, I had a double major in English and Latin —
ES: Oh, ok.
VS: —and a minor in Greek, which I’ve forgotten all of.
ES: [laughs] Yeah, me, too, and it’s only been 15 years...uh 10 years.
VS: And then I came to Dallas.
ES: Ok.
VS: When I came to Dallas—I married—and I came to Dallas, and there was no... Well, UD was really new at the time, so I didn’t really even think about UD, which was the only place, probably the only college, that had a Masters in Latin. So I, but I had a full ride to SMU, so I just got my Masters in English.
ES: Oh, ok. How come you decided to do English, then?
VS: That was my other field of teaching. And, uh, well, I really had not intended to be a teacher, I intended to be a house wife.
ES: Oh, I see! [laughs]
VS: But my mother made me get that teaching certificate and I was really glad I had it when I got divorced.
ES: Oh, yeah.
VS: You know that was—well I had actually intended to major in Comparative Literature, and bring in both my undergraduate majors, but they were phasing out that, so I only had a couple of classes in Comparative Literature. They were phasing out that major at the time.
ES: Ok.
VS: So, I just got the degree in straight English.
ES: SMU’s—that’s in Dallas? Yeah that’s in Dallas.
VS: Yeah. It’s in Hyde Park.
ES: I know they have a big Archaeology program, because that’s where one of my Archaeology professors at UTA went and got her PhD there. It’s most—a lot of it is South American, Mesoamerican Archaeology, but I don’t know about their Classics Program.
VS: It’s simply nonexistent, I think.
ES: [laughs] Ok.
VS: At some point—they occasionally have 2 years of Latin so that people can get their language off. Last I heard one of the teachers who had retired from the Richardson school district was teaching there, but I think it was only a couple of years, it was only part time and it was adjunct.
ES: So, how come you chose to do Latin, then, in your BA?
VS: You know, when I was in the 9th, no in the 8th grade in middle school we had a program called Exploratory and we had 6 weeks of 6 different things, we had Latin, Spanish—
ES: Oh, ok, yeah I think we had something similar.
VS: —and, you know ,I just fell in love with it. I tell people I fell in love with the Accusative case... [laughs] ... because it’s just so ...
ES: [laughs] Yeah, I know what you mean.
VS: It’s just so wonderful that you can move things around, and most kids hate that, but I just thought it was great.
ES: Yeah.
VS: You know it just resonated with me, in that 6 weeks. I just loved it, and I liked the teacher a lot. So, I decided to go ahead and do it. I don’t know it just really, it came very logically for me, it was not ever a struggle.

ES: Right, yeah.

VS: And I loved my teachers, I truly loved my Latin teachers.

ES: Yeah.

VS: So, that’s probably a big part of it, too.

ES: Well, yeah. So that was in junior high, then?

VS: Well, that was in 8th grade, and then in the 9th grade I went on and I had a wonderful teacher there, and then I had one not so wonderful teacher, [laughs]

ES: [laughs]

VS: and then I had another wonderful teacher for two years. So, I mean Latin was really big in that school. I mean there were 3 Latin teachers at my high school.

ES: Really? Ok.

VS: It was huge. No more.

ES: Considering you were in Wichita Falls!

VS: Yeah, no kidding. It was huge.

ES: Yeah.

VS: It doesn’t happen anymore.

ES: No.

VS: Although, I don’t know if they still have it or not. They had it for a while. There are 3 high schools there now.

ES: Ok.

VS: And the reason I then chose … your second question—Well, actually let me just go ahead to finish the education thing.

ES: Sure.

VS: I did have, I started the doctoral program at the University, UT Dallas, and I got a little bit of a pay raise. I did not finish it, because I got divorced at the time and had small children so I never did finish that. I have 30 hours, 24 hours or something like that for the doctorate, and I just let it lapse.

ES: Yeah. Yeah, I think a lot of people do that. Not uncommon. And what was that in?

VS: It was in Comparative Literature.

ES: Oh, ok. That was the one.

VS: They did have a program in Comparative Literature.

ES: Uh, let’s see. So, what was my next question? So you decided to, so how come you decided to teach Latin instead of English, then? Like one of my teachers …?

VS: Well, because I just love Latin more. As a matter of fact, when I got my first job I did teach English. I taught English for 25 years, or actually 22 years.

ES: Ok.

VS: I worked for 22 years. Actually, I worked for a semester at South Oak Cliff, but that didn’t work out. My baby was little. I would have probably… I didn’t even finish a year, because my little girl was—I wanted to be with her.

ES: Right.

VS: And then when I got divorced, I went back and I worked 22 years in Garland.

ES: Ok.

VS: Teaching both English and Latin.
ES: And are you still teaching there?
VS: No, I’m teaching at Bishop Lynch. Remember you visited me?
ES: Oh, that’s right. I always think that’s in Garland.
VS: Well, it’s on the way. It’s on the way, but it’s not in Garland. The Garland job was at a public school, that’s GISD.
ES: Oh! I see, alright.
VS: And that job just kinda fell in my lap.
ES: And so you’ve been at Bishop Lynch —?
VS: 12 years.
ES: 12 years. Ok. And the English that was for 22 years, that was before the Garland?
VS: No, that was in Garland.
ES: The same time, ok, alright.
VS: I taught English and Latin in Garland for 22 years.
ES: Um, and that was at a pr—in a public school?
VS: And actually then I went back. After that, I went back to Garland—after I retired, I went back part time and taught only Latin. But it was just half time.
ES: Oh.
VS: Yeah, they hired a teacher and he didn’t work out. So they called me after 5 weeks into semester—
ES: [laughs] Oh, no!
VS: I don’t know what was the matter with him, but he didn’t come to class, and so they fired him 5 weeks into the year and asked me to come back part time, so I did for 3 years. So, I worked in Garland 25 years, but the last 3 were only part-time.
ES: Right. Um, yeah, that happens. [laughs]
VS: I taught all levels of English. I started teaching what they would call basic English, which was remedial, and gradually worked up to Honors, which was more rewarding. Well, I don’t know, it was a lot more pleasant most of the time.
ES: [laughs] How did--? Because, I know that I’m taking reading in secondary school and I know that literacy is an issue. Totally off the topic of Latin, but ... [laughs] So, would you necessarily in the remedial classes, be teaching how to read as opposed to Shakespeare?
VS: Oh, yeah, when we did Shakespeare it was like, well, I don’t like the word “dumbed-down,” but basically simplified Shakespeare.
ES: Right.
VS: We basically did a lot of reading—in the remedial classes—a lot reading of simplified things, a lot of short writing.
ES: Right.
VS: You, know a lot of writing. One of the things, that was big then, and I think actually worked for kids, was giving them a pattern, a pattern for writing, but in the remedial classes we never really got over a paragraph.
ES: Really? Ok.
VS: Yeah. Actually, they probably do now, because they have to write a longer essay for the, whatever they call the state test now. It was TASK when I was doing it, or STARR. You know, I don’t know. They change the name of it every year.
ES: [laughs] That was 2006 or 2007? I don’t know when they changed it. I was working at the library when they changed it. And then, so for Latin, you taught from Elementary all the way through AP?
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VS: I didn’t teach Elementary.
ES: Oh, you didn’t? Ok.
VS: No, just high school. Oh! Are you talking about Elementary Latin, yeah Latin I.
ES: Yeah.
VS: Right, not, elementary school. Yes, beginning to AP.
ES: Ok, uh, let's see. I don’t know if they need to be necessarily in order…. [laughs]
VS: It doesn’t matter, it’s up to you.
ES: [laughs] I was curious about the difference between the public school versus the private school, because people keep telling me that maybe in the Catholic schools that kids would be more motivated, more interested in doing Latin than in high school.
ES: Yeah.
VS: You know what I find, where I am it’s not the first choice for many of them. It’s not the elite Catholic school. The elite Catholic schools are Ursuline and Jesuit.
ES: Yeah, Ron was just talking about that last night. Ok.
VS: A lot of our kids are pretty much average, and it came from, really, our former principal’s belief that anybody should be able to get a Catholic education, you know. And a lot of what they do at that school is theology, and service oriented. Actually, I think only about 70% of the student body is Catholic, –
ES: Oh, really?
VS: –and a lot of them are not very practicing Catholics, are lapsed or just lazy Catholics. But so many of them are. And what I find is more homogeneity in those kids. I don't have—with rare exceptions—I don’t have as really good of students as the few students that I had in public school. But I also don’t have the ones that are just very difficult to teach.
ES: Right.
VS: And while I don’t think a lot of my kids are really into what they—into the subject—they do care about their grades.
ES: Oh.
VS: And the parents—
ES: Right, ok. Yeah.
VS: —that’s the difference—the parents are much more involved.
ES: That’s what I was wondering, if at a—parents have put their kids in a private school, Catholic school, well they want them to do well, so they’re gonna be a bit more involved.
VS: Yeah, well, and they’re paying money.
ES: Yeah, exactly. [laughs]
VS: So, that’s the difference that I see. With rare exceptions, I have not had…, because in public school you just get everybody, and some of the best students I ever had were just kids that —One of the best students I ever had was a little kid that was just dirt poor, but he was just sweet, wonderful and smart, very smart, and the first kid that I ever had that took AP. I taught him – they wouldn’t put him in a separate class, and so I —
ES: [laughs] Because it was just him!
VS: It was just him and I taught him at lunch—
ES: Oh, ok!
VS: —after only — he only had 2 years of Latin.
ES: Really?
VS: Usually they have 3, but he was highly motivated, very smart, had an excellent memory. Which is one thing I’ve noticed is missing in many kids. It’s pathetic. Well, they have the attention span of a gnat. [laughs]
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ES: Yeah, we’ve talked about that both in my education classes and I’ve talked about it with Ron. You know, just these days… [laughs]

VS: Yeah, that’s a disagreement that I have with a lot of educators. You know, the owner of our school was telling us we should change activities every 15 or 20 minutes, because you can’t keep them engaged. And I really think what we ought to be doing is trying to extend their attention spans.

ES: [at the same time] Longevity! Yeah. [laughs]

VS: So, you know, I haven’t had that—I do have that disagreement with the powers that be, but they don’t give me too much trouble, so… And I do try to do, I roll up, because we have hour and a half classes. I think that’s too long with high schoolers, you know. I don’t like that, that they’re on the block schedule.

ES: [at the same time] On the block schedule, yeah…

VS: That’s too long, especially for a math and foreign language there’s so much more, if you have them every day. But you know what happened was that the state mandated so many things, that they had to provide 8 periods, instead of 6. So, anyway…

ES: Mmmm…yeah, we had 8, but we weren’t on the block system. We had the same classes.

VS: You had 8 every day?

ES: Yeah, but we were one, um, it was called …

VS: Was it that rotating system? My step-daughter I think was…

ES: They were modules, so a mod was 15 minutes, so you either had a 45 minute class or a 60 minute class, and um, the 60 minute classes would be the science and math. I think the languages were actually only 45, but you’d have the same class every day.

VS: Well, that’s probably enough. You know that’s, you could get a lot more done.

ES: Yeah.

VS: With two 45 minute classes than an hour and a half class. Primarily because you give homework in between, to, you know, reinforce it. Reinforce a smaller amount.

ES: Yeah, so we had homework every night for the next day, 5 days a week.

VS: I think an hour and a half is not only too long for them to sit, but it’s –

ES: And is that twice a week or three days a week?

VS: It depends. It depends, because, you know, because it alternates. Like if it’s Monday, Wednesday, Friday in one week, then the next week it would be Tuesday, Thursday.

ES: That would be so confusing! [laughs]

VS: It’s not.

ES: Oh, I guess you get used to it.

VS: Anyway. Yeah, you get used to it.

ES: Let’s see, umm. There was something I was going to ask, but now I don’t remember. Oh. How—so, I guess we did touch on how students, you know, they have less attention span. The students’ performance, has it changed over the years? You know, when you first started kids were, I don’t know, I get the impression that they might have been more studious than they are now. Even from when I was in the ‘90s, in school, and now—

VS: Some are.

ES: [laughs]

VS: I started in ’79 and we were then competing with television, and now we are competing with, you know, with phones and video games. So, I know. It’s so…

ES: Yeah. [laughs] So, in some ways technology has helped, in some ways it hasn’t. and I know having a phone in the room is like, for me, I’d be like here’s a basket, put your phone in
it, put your iPad in it. [laughs]

VS: I’ve never told them to put it in the …, but I have taken some up, and some teachers do:

“There’s a box, put it in there when you come in the room.”

ES: Oh, yeah, I guess, and similar is the view of Latin over the years in terms of how,

you’ve said that it’s—you really only have part time teachers, maybe only one teacher in

a school right now, as opposed to it being more popular back 50 years ago, I don’t know.

But now I’ve heard that it’s becoming more popular again, but in the ’90s, early 2000s, it

was really not, not as popular, and when I got my bachelors in 2001, there were more

people with degrees than could actually teach … [laughs] … because there just weren’t

the positions. People weren’t—it just wasn’t as popular. Is that what you found?

VS: Well, I don’t know, because I had a job, so, you know, I wasn’t looking.

ES: [laughs] Right, that’s true.

VS: I was just lucky, very lucky. Well, that one took me a very long time to find it. And they

weren’t hiring, they weren’t hiring. I was just lucky that, that uh, somebody resigned at

the last minute to go to law school, --

ES: Yeah.

VS: So, I fell into that job, which fed my kids for 22 years. What else can I say?

ES: [laughs] Right.

VS: What was I gonna say. I worry now that they have just changed the SAT.

ES: Have they? Again?

VS: This is the first year.

ES: Ok.

VS: This is the first year that they’ve done it, which is not emphasizing vocabulary so much.

ES: Really?

VS: Yeah, and it’s uh, you know, that’s a concern to me. Although I don’t think Latin’s going

away any time soon,

ES: No. Right.

VS: But, you know, it just comes in cycles, and I got job when it was down, so… It just, you

have to – There, there is an organization, the American Classical League—or

American Classical League, yeah…

ES: Yeah.

VS: And the Texas Classical Association —

ES: [laughs] Yeah, I always get them confused!

VS: — that posts jobs. They have a website that posts jobs.

ES: Yeah, I have them both saved, but I always get them confused in my head—and I’m sure

they’re very different, but … [laughs]

VS: Yeah, well there just, one’s state level. I think it’s the American Classical League that has

the website.

ES: Yeah. Right. Texas, uh…

VS: Classical Association. It’s TCA.

ES: Yeah, it’s TCA and ACL, right. [laughs] I have them bookmarked on my computer, and I

have stuff printed from them, too, in files.

VS: Yeah, and if you join they’ll, you know, send you periodically – they don’t have all of them,

but, you know, they’ll send you when there’s an opening.

ES: I think I, you know, when I first got here, or over the years, I’ve had membership off and

on. It’s just trying to keep track, and like when I went to England I canceled all my
memberships for over the year, but, [laugh] I just wasn’t paying attention, so
wasn’t paying for that year. It just depends. Let’s see … So did you, do you, I know there
seems to be a correlation between parental involvement these days (to me, anyway) and
the kids being less interested in their … you know, having smaller attention spans. Are
you having to give less homework and stuff?

VS: I don’t. Sometimes I tell a student—well the kids are way overburdened—I mean, you
know, they’ve got so many activities. That’s part of the problem, that you’re competing
with the activities, the sports, which always take precedence.

ES: [laughs] Yeah.

VS: Which consume a lot of their time. And I’ve had kids … We have a musical, and the kids
that are in the musical are up there until 11 o’clock every night.

ES: Yeah

VS: Rehearsing or doing the play. And I notice their working, and the good students’ work slacks
off those times.

ES: Yeah, we had activities in my high school. I was in plays and stuff. I wasn’t in sports or the
band, but I have heard that that is becoming more and more of a problem, and it’s starting
earlier, too. In elementary school, there’s all these afterschool activities and the kids can’t
get their homework done until 8 o’clock at night, and then they’ve got 3 hours of
homework. For me I had like 5 hours of homework when I get home. It’s just … so,
people are starting to give less homework, but then….

VS: Well, what they’ve asked us to do is give less homework, but more relevant homework, and
I think that for things like math and especially foreign language that repetition is so
important—

ES: It is!

VS: —and I’m not really sure that you can give … less. What I’ve noticed: a lot of cheating, a
lot of cheating.

ES: Really?

VS: Mmmmm..

ES: I hadn’t heard about that!

VS: They’ve taken down—Well, the textbook that I’m teaching out of, they’ve posted all the
translations. I’ve quit having them do the translations of the stories, because the translations
were all posted online.

ES: What book are you using?

VS: I’m using the *Ecce Romani*,

ES: Oh, ok

VS: --but I think that’s probably true for any of them.

ES: Yeah.

VS: And so we just do those in class and I give other assignments. Either I’ll make my own
sentences or, when they do translation.

ES: It would be, in that case you’d have to spend the time in the classroom to do the translations
so that you know that they’re not looking it up. [laughs]

VS: Exactly, exactly. You do. The homework that I give is mostly grammar.

ES: Yeah. Memorization.

VS: Or translation of my own sentences that I do.

ES: Yeah. So you’ve said that the you don’t use too much technology, but have you found that (I
know I wouldn’t either), but in terms of access, doing research papers and stuff like that, it’s a lot easier to get information about, you know, Roman culture and stuff online.

VS: They do, and I don’t do a whole lot of that. They will do that in the history classes. Yes, they do. I do require a paper and a project in Latin I on mythology, but they have to use one book. [laugh] They have to use one books that’s not online.—

ES: Ah, yes! [laughs]

VS: They have to do that. And then, I don’t do that – I need to do something in Latin II, but I haven’t recently done a project or paper in the last quarter. Latin IIIIs do an emperor report. They choose an emperor and do a report project.

ES: Oh, ok.

VS: Of course Latin IV we just—that’s just crazy translation. We just have to cram that in. We have to be sure everything’s covered. So.

ES: Oh, right.

VS: So, I don’t, they don’t do a whole lot of research. There are some sites—there’s one site, and you might want to mark it, it’s T A B N E Y.com and they have little exercises. That’s one of the best… T A B N E Y…

ES: N E Y? Tabney?

VS: Uh-huh. Well, his name is something Abney, Tom or Tim or something.

ES: [laughs] Ok. [laughs]

VS: And he has for a lot of books little matching exercises for vocabulary, things like that. Little games. That I don’t have time for. I think that he has way too much time on his hands. [laughs] Or insomnia, or something.

ES: [laughs]

VS: He has way more time than I have to do that. I do make a few PowerPoints, but not many. When I get inspired.

ES: Yeah, well…

VS: You know, I have one on the Imperfect Tense, but just a few.

ES: You can reuse them! [laughs]

VS: Oh, yeah! And I guess you are familiar with Blackboard, that program? For the students?

ES: Oh. Yeah. I’ve used it in various iterations over the past 10 or 15 years. Different schools have had it.

VS: Yeah, we’re required to use it to post assignments, and you can put your PPTs on that, and you can put your, you know, if they’re absent you can post your worksheets and handouts on it.

ES: Yeah.

VS: Some teachers, I’m not that technological, but, you now, they’ll record themselves doing a lecture and put it on there. I’m thinking there ain’t no way…

ES: [laughs] For one thing, I don’t like to hear myself speak, which can be a problem as a teacher, but nonetheless … it is helpful.

VS: I mean it’s just so incredibly time consuming, so. I mean, it’d be wonderful … Or, you know, if you did a lecture. Some teachers, especially history teachers, do a PowerPoint, because they’re talking about facts, you know.

ES: Yeah.

VS: And they do a PowerPoint. As a matter of fact, one history teacher I know said that he started going to PowerPoint for his lectures because, he taught, you know, several sections of the same class and he wasn't sure he always gave the same information.
ES: Yeah. Yeah.

VS: All the information. So he started doing that so they would have that. And those would be, if you wanted to take the time to make them, those would be great to post, but I have not ever done that.

ES: I know. I know me…

VS: But ours is not lecture, ours is like give and take. You know it’s like translating in class and what not.

ES: Yeah. For me, I know, lectures would be, I would never give the same lecture twice. You know, even if I have the exact same information.

VS: Well, you know, Math and Foreign Language don’t, and English really, don’t give themselves, they don’t really do well with lecture, I don’t think, because you just want give and take with the students.

ES: Yeah. Running through with the Accusative case, giving examples and having them work on them, yeah. The only thing I was, would be thinking, if I was doing a lecture, in terms of, for me, because I want to incorporate Archaeology, and Architecture and stuff, that, you know, I need to have slides for that.

VS: Uh-huh, yeah, you would need to do that.

ES: But otherwise, yeah…

VS: I do a lot of Mythology with the freshman, and we have a story every day. It’s 5 minutes at the beginning of class.

ES: In English? Do you have them, like read it in translation, like Edith Hamilton or something, or…?

VS: I did when I was teaching English.

ES: Ok.

VS: But, no, they don’t read it. I just read it, just read them a story.

ES: Oh, I see

VS: A lot of them by this time have had, a lot of the schools now have had a myth unit, a mythology unit in Middle School, so a lot of them—and plus with the Percy Jackson—

ES: [laughs] oh! Yeah

VS: They’re familiar with Greek and Roman mythology, much more than when I started.

ES: Really?

VS: Uh-huh, oh, yeah. Because when I was teaching sophomore English we did a whole unit on Mythology and it was new, it was very new to a lot of them, and now…

ES: That has never even occurred to me that it would be more, but yeah, you’re right, there are a lot more books and movies and whatnot.

VS: Yeah, it’s much more familiar to them.

ES: Hmm…How do you find the difference, you know, in terms of Elementary students versus AP students—Elementary Level—does it vary, there’s always going to be that one person who’s really good at it, versus the person that’s just doing it because…

VS: Exactly.

ES: because they want to do well to get into college? [laughs]

VS: Some of them because their mom’s made them take it or because they have to have a language.

ES: [laughs] Yes, exactly.

VS: Yes. [laughs] Yeah, you have very few that, I do, that like it well enough. They all say when they start out that they’re going to do four years, but then by the time they get to
Latin III and the real translations, they’re dropping out like flies. So, I only have one student in AP this year, and she’s excellent. She’ll do fine. She wants to come back and take my job, so I’ll see if I can hang in there long enough for her to get a degree. [laughs]

ES: Yeah. [laughs]

VS: Another next year wants to do it that’s really good, and another one that wants to do it next year that’s not very good and we’ll see how she does. I’ve had several that once they see what AP requires, you know, they’ll drop out after two weeks. I’ve had that.

ES: [laughs] Yeah, it’s, it’s…for me I’ve found the actual textual reading more challenging, but…I relish the challenge—

VS: Well, that’s good.

ES: So I would spend all afternoon doing it, but I knew many kids who wouldn’t do that.

VS: No, many won’t. They have to love it. They have to love it. They have to not only be really good, but they have to love it.

ES: Yeah.

VS: This year. What did, what…they changed it last year, or two years ago…The AP class now…There used to be four tracks of AP and you could choose.

ES: Oh, ok.

VS: Then they narrowed it down just to the Aeneid. The last 3 years, the new AP test (this is the first year I’ve taught it) is half Caesar and half Virgil. Virgil’s cut down. And I hate Caesar, I just hate it.

ES: Oh. [laughs]

VS: But some power that be wanted to do prose, so.

ES: Yeah, makes sense.

VS: Caesar, I just found the substance—obviously he writes very good Latin prose—

ES: Right! [laughs]

VS: But I just found the subject matter boring.

ES: I read the Gallic Wars, or part of them, in some of my classes. Well, I found the Anthropological aspect interesting, his comments about it, but, yeah, after a while, how many battles…? [laughs]

VS: Battles. Geography. So, anyway, but I’m doing it. But I do Caesar first to get it out of the way. So we’re working on the Aeneid now, and interestingly enough she finds Caesar much easier.

ES: Huh.

VS: I don’t, and I think it’s because I’m just so familiar with the Aeneid, because I’ve done it so many times.

ES: Oh, yeah.

VS: But it is poetry. Poetry’s harder.

ES: It is!

VS: And this child doesn’t. She loves Latin, but she has the soul of an engineer. [laughs] She doesn’t love poetry like she should. –

ES: I have—

VS: She loves the grammar. So we’ll see. She’ll do well on the AP, she’ll do fine.

ES: I found, you know, I like reading poetry, but I have always had a really hard time with meter and stuff, for the life of me. I’ve been in choir, I’ve done dance classes, I’ve played an instrument, but I can’t…

VS: That’s interesting, because if you know music, because I think it’s the same as reading music,
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you know. Long and short.

ES: Yeah.

VS: That’s interesting. I never had any trouble with that. She does, she does, it doesn’t sing to her.

ES: Right, yeah.

VS: For me it just kinda rolls for me, especially that dactylic hexameter it just rolls off, but she struggles with that.

ES: Well, once I get into it I think, sometimes, yeah, but then like when we were reading Catullus and different poems would be—it wouldn’t be obvious to me that the meter was changing, and it’s just, I don’t know. Something about my brain. [laughs] So… So, you're only teaching Latin right now?

VS: Yes, and I’ve told them that I will not teach English.

ES: Why not?

VS: I’m done with it, because it’s just too much work.

ES: Oh. Ok.

VS: It’s too much. It’s just grading. I hardly ever bring anything home anymore.

ES: Oh, yeah.

VS: And of course this job has only been, well it’s part-time, I started part-time, I went full-time, taught full-time for two years, then back to part-time. It just depends on how many students sign up for it. And then I had, for 10 years I had to travel, I had to float, I didn't have a room. I finally got a room last year, it was wonderful. I hope I can keep it.

ES: That that would be nice. Yeah, I guess I remember. Yeah, you went from one end of the building to the other…

VS: Yeah, if you’ll remember that, because you were there when I was doing that, so…

ES: That is … that would be so frustrating!

VS: What year was that, that you came? Was that, 4 years ago …?

ES: What was it, like 2 years ago? More than that. I can't remember.

VS: Maybe more… Anyway, any other questions?

ES: Well, we got through all those, but I think, maybe you didn't …

VS: One thing that's really important, you won’t have a choice if you teach in a public school, but you will in a private school, is to choose a textbook.

ES: Oh! Okay yeah, that is actually …

VS: They were using Jenney when I started. Some students, some teachers swear by Wheelock. That’s probably what you used.

ES: [I have used it…]

VS: I have never taught out of Wheelock, but I have tutored out of it. The book I chose, and it was a parent that was a Latin teacher at one of the middle schools suggested it. I liked it partly because of the the access to helpful things on the internet. You know the little games that I told you about before. I taught out of Cambridge for a long time. I did not like Cambridge. There’s supposed to be a new one out called Latin for the New Millennium and that,

ES: Huh, not heard of that….

VS: Well I heard people complaining about Cambridge, because they say if you’re trying to, you know, if the goal is to get these kids to AP, that Cambridge does not do a very good job of giving them the vocabulary that they’re gonna need for Virgil and Caesar.

ES: Oh. Ok
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VS: And there's one called *Latin for the New Millennium*, I think, that does a better job of that.

ES: Yeah.

VS: One thing you might want, to get on somebody's mailing list. There is a publishing house that specializes in the classics called Bolchazy-Carducci. Do you know them?

ES: Yeah, I'm not on their list, but I was familiar with them when I got my bachelors, but yeah…

VS: Okay. You probably ought to just get on their list. They'll mail you catalogues for free.

ES: You know, they'll be thrilled to, or you can access them online, too.

VS: Oh, right, yeah.

ES: Yeah.

VS: Do you get their catalogue?

ES: Yeah, I'm not on their list, but I was familiar with them when I got my bachelors, but yeah…

VS: Okay. You probably ought to just get on their list. They'll mail you catalogues for free.

ES: Yeah.

VS: I just, you know, they come out with new stuff all the time.

ES: I can never remember how to spell …

VS: B O L C H A Z Y C A R D U C C I

ES: I know it's, you know, Italian. So I think I used oxford. *The Oxford Latin*, when I was in college.

VS: I have, yeah, I have never been familiar with that.

ES: What I have also just found, it's not that new, it's the the *Lingua Latina*, I always… Latina

Lingua? … but it's just a different approach to it.

VS: Yeah I'm not familiar with that one either. One thing that's kinda trendy is that spoken, which I don't. I can't and don't do is this conversational Latin. That’s tough for me. Have you heard of that…?

ES: Conversational? Yeah, I know it’s become more of a… more popular, I know when I’ve done research on it. I am not sure I could do it. I love the idea in terms of teaching, but I’m not sure I could teach it, because I don't know Latin, you know, I’m not used to …

VS: Yeah, if you didn't learn it that way. And one of the things, frankly one of the advantages of the old-fashioned just translation is to teach them how to take a problem and break it down.

ES: Yeah.

VS: You know. To look at a look at a sentence and and analyze it. They are not doing that, but—and a real disadvantage is that middle schools are not very good anymore at teaching English grammar.

ES: Yeah.

VS: They don't know the terminology, they don't understand and they don't like it. They don’t like analyzing grammar.

ES: In my reading in secondary school class we read several articles that it’s become more prevalent that we need to get back into teaching English and, both at the elementary level and at the you know high school level, junior high and high school level, because students are not getting there the content area terminology. They just, you know, the teachers assume they already know how to read, but they don't necessarily teach them how to read. I had not really thought about that, but it's true. You sort of assume that kids know what the terminology is or, you know. It makes sense, but because I know we didn’t really focus on it too much after elementary school, but it – one of the arguments for doing Latin or Greek is that it helps you—I know it helped me—helps in literacy, because you’re actually learning to figure out the, you know, grammar and for me, yeah, I took it in junior high, elementary school and junior high, but it didn’t really stick until I took Latin—and maybe because, you know, of the Accusative case. You know, like, right. For me it was like, hey, look! A Nominative case, Accusative case. For me it visually made more sense and I know
that in England there’s a whole association that’s starting to have literacy using Latin as the base for teaching kids how to read and understand and as you said, breaking the sentence down and analyze it. They’re just not doing that.

VS: Yeah, I’m not familiar with that, but it seems like it would be a good idea.

ES: Yeah, it does. That is interesting that you say that. So it’s been more and more that kids have been not able, like when they’re coming into the high school level, you’re finding they’re just don’t know … ?

VS: Yeah, they don't know English grammar, and they haven’t learned to to read phonetically, you know, so … and that’s a problem, because they don't like to look at the end of a word and that’s where everything is, you know. So..

ES: [laughs] I hadn’t thought about that! That is… Yeah, how do you…?

VS: You know it’s like you look at this word and sort of a general impression. [laughs]

ES: It seems like, how do you read without reading the whole thing?

VS: So, and like I say, some are just wonderful and they pick it up right away, and some, you know, some a lot of it depends on their work ethic, frankly.

ES: Oh, that’s true.

VS: I mean, I would think that that is the most important determiner of how, you know, anybody’s gonna succeed.

ES: Yeah.

VS: You know. Will you sit down and stick to it, will you work at it until you understand it, do you care enough to understand it. And some of them don’t, and some of them do.

ES: Right. Yeah, and yeah, We’d like to get them interested, but yeah that's what all teachers struggle with. Either they do or they don’t and there’s not much, maybe you might inspire someone, but still… and if you're taking a Latin class—for, for your students, is is Latin required, because it's … ? Okay. I know some…

VS: No and most of us, I don't think any do anymore, and as a matter of fact, I think at Ursuline they discontinued it in favor of Arabic, which is ridiculous, but

ES: Wow!

VS: but, no, most of our students take Spanish, and French is probably a little bit ahead of Latin and then German. We have those four languages. German just never does pick up much. We have a really great German teacher. Well I don’t know how good she is, but she does a lot of stuff. She's really good with technology.

ES: Oh, ok.

VS: She does a lot of games and stuff, but I’m not really sure how much they really learn, frankly.

ES: I know …

VS: She does a lot of culture.

ES: Oh, well, yeah. I know that part of the TEKS, you have, even in the foreign language classes, you have to do culture, as well as …

VS: Yeah, you’re gonna have to do that, you know, if you teach. I don’t have to mess with that too much,

ES: Yeah.

VS: and I don’t, and I wouldn’t, I’d retire before I did that, but anyway.

ES: [laughs] Yeah.

VS: But if you teach in a public school, but that’s not that, you know, you can you can lie or just stick it in, you know. See what you have to stick in, and just, you know, when I was in public school you did have to document that on your lesson plans.
ES: Really?

VS: Yeah, but it’s not that hard. I mean, you know, just put numbers on there—I don’t think anybody reads it closely, I don’t think. Nobody questions it…

ES: Well that’s interesting, I have wondered.

VS: As long as you have some numbers up there.

ES: I know when you submit your lesson plans the afternoon have all the parts, and I’m like I’m not very good at getting all the details. That’s really … but you know obviously for me, because I’m interested—I love Latin, obviously—but I’m also interested in the Roman culture and the whole aspect of why I went into archaeology is, you know, the architecture and the art and stuff. I’m going to be teaching that anyway, so that’s cultural and the mythology …

VS: It helps. Then you’d be doing much better than I am in that. I’m weak in that, I think. I’m weak in the history. I’m trying to do better, but …

ES: So, for … yeah, I don’t remember… For the private schools do … in order for the AP you are still doing, you still have to get the regular, you know, language, culture, history, mythology stuff for the AP, but you don’t have the same requirements to do TEKS, right?

VS: Right.

ES: Ok.

VS: and frankly what you need to do when you teach AP, is is to look at the test, see what’s the test, which is mostly translation. Although they do have to write an essay.

ES: Interesting.

VS: Analytical essay, and so yeah you need to look into that.

ES: And in and in

VS: And there’s a lot of well …

ES: Do they have to do composition, or just…?

VS: It’s not in Latin, no. The essay’s analyzing passages from English, usually just compare and Contrast. They’ll give two passages from what you’ve read. Then you have to write an essay. And you can just look at that, and you will before you teach. You know, you have to set up your, you have to get your AP class, what do they call it? Documented. You have to do that and it’s a hassle, and what I would suggest, you know, once you get ready to teach is to take a class. They offer them, it’s a week long course in just the Latin AP.

ES: I think the University of Dallas has it when I’ve …

VS: They they do sometimes. I’ve taken it out there.

ES: ... in the summer …

VS: Yes, it is in the summer. They’re always, well, they have to be for teachers.

ES: [laughs] Well, good point. Yeah, that’s true.

VS: Then I took one a couple years ago at TCU, and I’m thinking about doing it again this summer if the school will pay for it.

ES: Is it just to update you on the changes to the AP system?

VS: Well, yeah, and just to give you strategies you know, and I’ve found it very useful, you know, and to show you how AP’s graded. It's a money making thing for the college board.

ES: Oh. Yeah.

VS: They can get they can get college credit, if that's what they’re after.

ES: I guess I did not know that. I mean, we had AP at my high school, but I didn’t ever do it.

VS: It was… we didn't have it at my school. So what I took, what I did when I went to
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undergraduate was take the CLEP, you know, the test that they give for placement. I
didn’t get any hours for it, but I got put in a junior class, because I did four years, you
know.

ES: Right. Yeah, yeah.
VS: So…
ES: Did they have … I don’t even know when the AP started…
VS: I don’t know. To be very honest, I don’t either, because I was out of schools for so long.
ES: Right.
VS: but that's … , you know, there’s just a lot of stuff you learn as you go.
ES: That's what I have heard! [laughs]
VS: Setting up your AP class, getting it whatever they call it nowadays. It’s not validated, it’s
like audited, I think. You have to do what they call an audit and you have to submit it.
Actually now you can just kinda look and pick one. They have several sample ones online,
and you can just pick one. It's not that much trouble, but what you need to do is go to one
of those classes. If you ever are going to have to teach an AP class, you need to do one of
those in the summer.
ES: Yeah, that's what, I guess, been one of my biggest concerns. I’m okay with Elementary and I
wouldn't mind doing AP later, but, you know, once I…
VS: Yeah. I didn't start with it, either.
ES: [laughs]
VS: So, I just started with Latin I and Latin II, but I was having to teach English, too. And that
might be if you can find the job in a middle school, or start a program in a middle school.
ES: Yeah.
VS: … and then you don't have the pressure of getting them ready for the AP.
ES: Yeah.
VS: Because I didn’t do it for a long time, but I was just lucky that first kid that I taught AP to at
lunch. He got a four out of five on the AP, you know.
ES: Wow, yeah.
VS: but he was just really … he had the iron butt, to stick to it. He went, he ended up going to
Annapolis. He was really good for public school. Great kid.
ES: Yeah, that's pretty … you said, so he only had two years and then he did one year of AP.
VS: and he did it at lunch [laughs]
ES: [laughs]
VS: but it was everyday.
ES: Ok.
VS: We covered what we had to cover in the Aeneid, and that’s the thing, he remembered it.
ES: Yeah.
VS: You know, that’s thing, that's the big problem is that you go over all the stuff, you complete
the curriculum, but can they remember what they translated. You do need to, just, you
need to take that course, or at least get a
ES: Yeah.
VS: get a, before you do that, but start, if you can, start start with four levels if you can possibly
help it.
ES: Right. Well, I would guess I probably will be part-time. I might just do two, I have no
idea at this point.
VS: Yeah, you know, you just have to see what’s available when you’re ready. How long do
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you think it’s going to take you more at school? When are you going to get out of school?

ES: It’s a two-year program. So this is my first year, and then next year I’ll be doing the
… I think I have one or two more classes, but then I have the student teaching and they
have what’s called a practicum, which is actually a term of sitting in, and then there’s
another class where you sit in like three days a week and then once a week you go in and
talk—there’s a class on the UD campus and I guess you're sort of analyzing things. I’m
not entirely sure, I’ve just talked to students who are taking it. So, I know those are two
of our requirements. In which case, I will have to be balancing when I will be in the
classroom and when I'll be in my own classes. And that’ll be next year and I’m hoping to
finish, you know, it should be two years. I’m looking forward to it. It’s just been a long
process, because it had been so long since I did Latin. I think I probably told you. So, I
had three years of Latin and then general education requirements, because I didn't do my
bachelors in Texas.

VS: Oh, ok.

ES: So, I didn’t have … American History wasn’t required, I had European History and I then did
have to take a politics class. I am thankful, unlike the undergrads, that I didn’t have to
take a Texas History.

VS: That’s actually interesting

ES: [laughs] For the graduate program I still had to take you know some of the gen eds, that I’d
not ever taken: a math class I took this summer… Took three years to get into a two-year
program, but oh, well. You know it's good, because I wouldn't have wanted to teach, you
know. I knew I didn't know Latin well enough and I needed to get re-familiar with it and,
you know. So it just wasn’t as much of an issue.

VS: Yeah.

ES: Yeah. I’m hoping in the next, you know, I guess I will probably start looking next year more
in depth what schools have Latin where, but everybody I’ve talked to says it’s, you know—
well, ok, I’m in the classics where I know people who teach Latin, so …

VS: There's usually job openings. Are you, are you willing to go other places besides the Dallas
area.

ES: Yeah, that’s the thing.

VS: Because are openings all over the country and all over Texas.

ES: Right.

VS: And they start coming in about probably about April.

ES: Oh, that’s good to know. Ok. April. I guess I should start looking here.

VS: Some of them, though, sometimes they’ll advertise for like a long-term sub, someone’s having
a baby or a surgery or something.

ES: Right. Yeah. I did talk about doing subbing for a while, like that’s what Ron did for years,
but I can’t. I don't do well with disorganization and like out of the blue stuff, just would
drive me crazy. So if I could do like a long-term you, know, three months

VS: Yeah.

ES: At one school and I could get to to know the kids and I’d know what my schedule is,
it would be much easier for me than doing, you know, history one week or one day,
then art the next day.

VS: Most of those are just you know baby-sitting, because the teachers [are supposed to leave
stuff, but they don’t] …

ES: Yeah, it’s true.
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782 VS: … sometimes there’s discipline problems.
783 ES: Yeah. Alright. Well I, this has been great.
784 VS: I hope you got all the information you needed.
785 ES: Yeah, well we didn’t really have… these were just the questions that I came up with, but I
786 really, uh…—she wants us to just get an idea of the teaching, you know, maybe things
787 have changed a bit. Like one of the, we could choose to talk to either a teacher or just
788 somebody who has had a pretty, you know, wasn’t a teacher, but just about their education
789 experience just to compare with our own. So, it should…
790 VS: That’s pretty broad!
791 ES: [laughs] Yeah! This has been…
792 VS: Well, let me know, you know, if you have any other questions you can e-mail me, or if you
793 think of anything that I need to elaborate on, send me an e-mail.
794 ES: Right, yeah. After I get and look.
795 VS: I hope I gave you enough to write your paper.
796 ES: It’s been pretty helpful. Yeah, I didn’t write a whole lot, but I figure I’m going to be doing
797 back and listening. So… I’m not very good—I’m usually very good at writing things, um
798 but I’m always afraid I’m going to miss something. One of the reasons why I’m
799 having it recorded.
800 VS: One thing I didn’t tell you, when you interview, the first thing you need to tell them is that
801 you love kids. They are way more interested in that most of the time.
802 ES: Really?
803 VS: Oh, yes, and that’s important!
804 ES: Yeah.
805 VS: So if you don't love kids you’re going learn to really fast. [laughs] A lot of people don’t like
806 teenagers and a lot of people don’t like middle school kids. Yeah, I don’t like middle
807 school kids, I don’t think I could teach in the middle school.
808 ES: Yeah, I’m not sure I could.
809 VS: But high schoolers, high schoolers are different. You know it’ll depend on and frankly you
810 get better support discipline-wise from some schools than others from the administration,
811 that's important. To get discipline support from the administration.
812 ES: Do they … I know there's been a new—and the support reminds me—here has been a
813 trend and I haven’t even heard about it in any of my classes, but what do they call it? Yeah,
814 team teaching? I don't know if that’s really possible for a Latin teacher.
815 VS: Uh, you know, you could. I don't know, the things that I've heard it in, that they actually at
816 my school way back in the 60s started.
817 ES: Really?
818 VS: Yes. It was a two period class taught by two teachers. American Lit and American History.
819 ES: Well that makes sense.
820 VS: My daughter went to Greenhill and they had something like that in European History, where
821 they would do the – or maybe in Ancient History. It was in Ancient History, where they
822 would do the history, the architecture, and art, the literature and, you know, so that’s the
823 kind of thing that I’ve heard of with team teaching. Latin might work with Ancient History,
824 ES: Yeah,
825 VS: but I don't know. Most of the time when you do — what was I gonna say? — it’s broader than
826 that.
827 ES: Yeah.
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VS: So, I don’t know what would work. Maybe in art
ES: [Yeah, that’s a good point.]
VS: if you can get the school to do it; and it it takes more effort than you would imagine to get a
new class into the curriculum.
ES: [laughs] Yeah.
VS: It’s … you have to propose it and write – Oh, this one teacher is trying to get a PE class
called Circus Acrobats or something, I don’t know. It sounds like a dream, but I think …
it’d be fun, you know, unicycling and juggling, you know, which would be. She said, well
it could be crossover. It could be Fine Arts or PE and theoretically it could be, but it’s …
I’m thinking she's gonna have a hard time getting it through the curriculum council or
whatever they have and it may be even harder in public schools to get a new class.
ES: Yeah, I’m not sure.
VS: I don't know who you have to go through in public schools, if it’s the school board or
individual. Individual schools can do it. I know we one time, we had a class of the
bible as literature which I thought would be great, but as an elective. It didn’t last very
long, so but you really understood it. Well, anyway, well, if you have any other questions
just email me and I’ll try to email you back the answers.
ES: Yeah, I sure will. I do try to email frequently, but not always.