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Dr. Frank Doe: Reflective Teacher Who Emulates the Ideals of Liberal Education

Clare Ruedi

University of Dallas, clare.ruedi@gmail.com

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1 **Clare Ruedi:** Here we go. It is 12:05 PM, on March 29th. Before I begin, Dr. Doe, I
2 would like to ask for your permission to transcribe and deposit this interview to the UD
3 oral history repository. Would that be all right?
4

5 **Frank Doe:** That would be fine by me.
6

7 **CR:** Perfect. Awesome. Then we can begin. I wanted to begin by asking you what your
8 education background is, so we can understand where you are coming from, and then
9 where you are now, in terms of where you came from?
10

11 **FD:** So I was born in Dover, New Hampshire, small town in southern New Hampshire
12 and then right after I was born, pretty much after I was born my folks moved to, family
13 moved to a place outside of Boston. So I went to, unlike most of you, I went to two
14 colleges. They couldn't take me at the first one I guess but I went to Boston College and
15 Spring Hill College, Boston College obviously in Boston, now a big University. Spring
16 Hill College is a liberal arts college, a Catholic liberal arts college, in Mobile Alabama.
17 So, it was a number of years, a number of years, to get my BS degree in Biology, and
18 then I went in the Seminary for a little while, and then I went to graduate school and got
19 my PhD at graduate school in Biology. So that encompassed many years. I remember my
20 dad asking me at some point in this academic journey of mine...now I remember him...he
21 said "Frank, are you ever going to get a job?"
22

23 **CR:** Oh no, oh no (laughing)
24

25 **FD:** Yeah, so now I can say...after 47 years, "Dad, is that enough? (laughing)
26

27 **CR:** Is that enough? Have I done enough? Rest assured, he's probably more than happy
28 with what you've done, my goodness.
29

30 **FD:** He'd probably say, "You're a darn fool, for working that long.
31

32 **CR:** Yeah, and for being here as long as you have. That's so funny. So what brought you
33 to UD then?
34

35 **FD:** After I got my PhD toward the very end, looking for a job of course. So I was
36 looking for a place, three or four things in mind. I was looking for, of course I was
37 looking for an academic job at a college or university. So I wanted it to be a small place,
38 a liberal arts place. I to the University of Wisconsin for one summer, I didn't include that,
39 it was just one summer. But outside of that I had never been in a big state school. I had
40 always been at a relatively small private, even for my PhD. So I wanted it to be a small
41 college or university, a Catholic school was definitely a plus, not a necessity but a plus.
42 And I wanted to be near a research university, near a research center, because I wanted to
43 get into Genetics and my PhD was more in the cell biology sphere, but Genetics was
44 really my first love. And it's a long story why I didn't do it at graduate school, but so I
45 wanted to do a post-doctorate work in Genetics, so I didn't want to be out in Dinebox,
46 TX, wherever that is, or Oshkosh, Wisconsin wherever that is, out in the middle of

47 nowhere. I wanted to be near research so I could work with a geneticist. So that was one
48 of the ingredients.

49

50 **CR:** And have you been able to do that while being at UD, proficiently?

51

52 **FR:** Yes, so...small school. Catholic, and I wasn't married at the time. So I wanted to stay
53 in the United States, but I had been exposed to the South. I like Mobile. I like the warm
54 climate. The older I've gotten, the more I've like it. So, anyways, small school, Catholic
55 school, and when I got down here Don Cowan who was president at the time. He knew
56 about this...I essentially, unless I had labs in the afternoon, I would teach my classes and
57 then wander off to what is now University of Texas at Dallas. It used to be called the
58 Southwest Center for Advanced Studies. SCAS, decades ago. Great, great think tank for
59 the sciences, Molecular Biology, certain areas of Chemistry, Genealogy, areas of Physics,
60 and Math. And it was funded by the people, the benefactors from TI, Texas
61 Instruments. And when money ran low, the University of Texas took over. So I would
62 teach here in the morning, and then in the afternoons, I would go out there, and then work
63 till 8 or 9 o'clock at night. So I essentially had two jobs. I wasn't getting paid for the job
64 over there, but the president knew about it and he gave his blessing...And that's how I
65 learned some Genetics, working with the chairman, the professor; he was just terrific. So
66 that's why I wound up here.

67

68 **CR:** And is that why you stayed at UD so long? What was something that drew you to
69 UD?

70

71 **FD:** And I've said this many times over the last 20 or 30 years. "why, why have you
72 stayed so long?" You know, and the faculty's nice, some nicer than others, as you would
73 say.

74

75 **CR:** Haha, mm-hhm, yes.

76

77 **FD:** Some easier to get along with and that's fine. That's all universities. All faculty is
78 the same way. Some are easier to get along with than others. I don't have the list. So
79 that's fine and the administration is fine, fine. No huge problems. "But why did you stay
80 so long, ya know?" And I think it's very clear why I stayed...(points at Clare Ruedi),
81 people just like you, are here. The students. I think that's why I stayed. And I've told
82 people that...parents...and I've been here forever. "So what is it? How come you guys?"
83 I've never taught any place else. Maybe, just. I don't think so, but just maybe wherever I
84 plump down and dealt with young people who are students, maybe I would have liked it
85 there too. But I don't know. I don't know. I've never done that experiment. I've...I've
86 only been here. So...but I look at you guys and I say "How come?" And I say
87 "Well...what about the SAT scores or the ACT scores. Well, I say, well, you could've
88 gone maybe to Rice or Caltech...and the SAT scores and the ACT scores, I'm sure,
89 would be higher. And that's probably, that's probably true. And other universities as
90 well...maybe Trinity. Those scores, those numbers may have been better, and that's
91 probably true. But then I say, "What else? What is it about you guys, that is not on a
92 numerical scale, and not a test score?" And I look at things like honesty, integrity,

93 responsibility, charity, cooperativity, humor, common sense...So if you stack all these
94 things up, and people look at you, they look at you, and the UD student is way up there.
95 I'm not sure about students at other places, where they would rank. And then there's
96 something else too...Sometimes, sometimes you guys don't come in with these virtues or
97 these characteristics, but before you graduate, you get them, somehow. Humility, also a
98 nice characteristic I find in the students. I think a very important one...and you came in
99 with it, and a lot of your colleagues didn't (laughing), is work ethic. If you guys don't
100 have that when you come in, somehow, somewhere, you get it. And it's so boring, you
101 know if we tell that to admissions. Oh my gosh, that wouldn't sell. Can you imagine
102 telling high school students, you know, "If you come here, you're gonna, you're gonna
103 develop a fantastic work ethic!" Even their parents will say, uhhh...But what an
104 important thing...A very important thing. It doesn't sell, but what an important thing. So,
105 why have you stayed? Well you know better than I do...These are all your buddies.

106
107 **CR:** That's true. That is more than true. I can attest to the virtues, because I have friends
108 who are just that way.

109
110 **FD:** And hopefully you're that way.

111
112 **CR:** Hopefully I am. They rub off on me. After four years I have no choice but to
113 become that way. One thing I wanted to ask about...the classroom...you have a distinct
114 way of teaching. Everyone does. And I'm sure you have something to say about what
115 you've chosen, how you've chosen it s a method of teaching, your preferred style. Any
116 words about that?

117
118 **FD:** Yeah. So in the classroom, of course in seminars it's a little but different there.
119 They're small, interactive. It's a lot different. In a seminar, you like to get the
120 students...even in a regular class, I get the students involved. But in science, a lot of our
121 classes are lecture-style in the beginning, particularly so. The seminars, with juniors and
122 seniors, are hopefully where we can have a more interactive environment. I'm sure in
123 your courses as well you've experienced that.

124
125 **CR:** mm-hmm

126
127 **FD:** So, that's nice...in small groups. We get in rather deep discussions. And people
128 know something about the material or science. In the other, in the lecture courses, in the
129 core course, I have always used (laughs), I've always used transparencies. And I still do.
130 You poor guys, you walk in and these freshmans...they, ya know...they look at that old
131 codger, and look at the...well they never saw one of these overheads, ya know...I got all
132 of these from education. They gave me...I guess nobody uses them anymore.

133
134 **CR:** Uh--huh. Nobody uses them anymore.

135
136 **FD:** They gave me all that stuff.

137

138 **CR:** It closely resembles the back to basics movement there that we talk about a lot in the
139 education department.

140

141 **FD:** So, I always use overheads forever and ever. And I still do. And one of the reasons
142 is, I like to think that what is important, or at least what I think is important...the student
143 hopefully listens. If they are awake, they listen, and they see. I try to write down, and I
144 try to say and explain what I think is important, and then a summary at least of what
145 points they can read. That's what, that's what I try to do. You know, you know what's
146 interesting....and so you're, you're gonna be a teacher?

147

148 **CR:** Yes. This coming Fall

149

150 **FD:** God bless ya. It would be hard for me to say anything against that. One of the
151 interesting things I've found as a teacher, I've got a couple points. Sometimes, because
152 we're human...sometimes we make mistakes in the classroom. And then we realize we
153 made a mistake. Or a student points it out, very nicely, points out the issue or problem.
154 But we made a mistake. And I found, I found in those classes where I made a
155 mistake...and I don't do it on purpose, I think I make enough without doing that...I find
156 that when I make a mistake, all of a sudden the class is there, is more, is more with it,
157 than ever. I don't know why that is...but ya, know...The other thing I found out...it took
158 me many years to know about this...I have, one student in mind, in particular. I can have
159 a class of fifty students, and, I remember I had this one kid...I won't give you his full
160 name...John...he's a great guy, but John, who was in Genetics, so General Biology.
161 John..he was just jibber jibber jibber jabber jibber jabber. And very vocal. Extrovert.
162 Nice. He's a physician now. I remember having him in class. It used to bug the hell out of
163 me. Because he would be jibber jabbering jibber jabbering way over in the corner. And I
164 would get distracted. And all of a sudden I'd think that because my attention to what I
165 was doing and teaching. All of that would get very distracted. Because half of my
166 attention would be saying to John to shut up. Not sure if I ever said it to him. I learned.
167 Maybe somebody pointed it out to me, but I learned "Frank, don't pay attention to John
168 and what he's doing, what he's not doing. You have forty nine kids in this class who are
169 really attentive, and who wanna learn this stuff. So your job is to teach them. Concentrate
170 on them and not the one person who's distracting you for one reason or another. It took
171 me a long time to learn that very simple thing. But it's true. It's true.

172

173 **FD:** And then again I learned the hard way. It was another year, wasn't the same guy. I
174 won't use his name, and he's turned out really well. He was a freshman lab assistant. This
175 gal Donna was one of my lab assistants, junior or senior biology or chemistry major. And
176 this other guy was in General Biology, and he kept begging Donna for a date. He wanted
177 to go out with her. And that's fine, you know I, I don't interfere with you guys. I don't
178 even know what's going on, unless I see you all 'luvvy duvvy' in the parking lots. It's
179 none of my business. So it was up to Donna, the young lady, and what she wanted. She
180 got a kick outta it actually. But, he didn't study. He didn't study. And he'd come in and
181 say Dr. Doe...Dr. Doe...and I got very frustrated with him because he was making no
182 progress. He didn't seem to want to learn, and ya know, I just got frustrated with him.
183 And I told him...I've never done this...I never did this before, and I have not done this

184 since. I said his name, and I said, “I never want you to darken the door to my office ever
185 again. He didn’t. I just...it’s something that should never be said to anyone.
186 I mean, what right does ANYone of us have to give up on somebody else? So I really
187 regret that. When I see him again, he’s on my list, to say I’m sorry about that. So,
188 anyway, he’s done fine. He’s doing okay, in spite of...
189

190 **FD:** And I’ll tell somebody else and they may say, “Well Frank, you gotta look at
191 it...maybe that really helped him”...and that doesn’t make me feel any better cause I still,
192 I don’t think I had a right to say that to him. But I’m more hopeful now than ever.
193 Another guy, completely different student-his name was Ollie. He came in after the first
194 exam, again this was twenty or thirty years ago...he came in after the first General
195 Biology exam, and he said he did poorly. (laughing) I remember, I remember, he came in
196 not to argue, and he had his exam with him, and he got a thirty six percent on the first
197 General Biology exam. That was far below average. Now a lot of students don’t do well
198 on that. But that was well below average. Thirty-six percent. And he, he came in and he
199 stood there, and he held his paper up, and he said, non-accusatory, “Dr. Doe, this will
200 never never happen again”. I said, “Okay Ollie”...It never never never happened again!
201 And he went to Southwestern Medical School, and he’s now a physician.
202

203 **CR:** Wow...oh my goodness! How beautiful! That’s like a dream come true for a
204 teacher. These are some really good stories...so I know that you obviously spend a lot of
205 time with students...that’s been shown here and there again, especially even by my
206 cousin, who talks to me about that...and how much time with spend with pre-health, pre-
207 med students. You advise them. How did you get into that area at this university?
208

209 **FD:** When I came here in 1969, not 1869 as you think...
210

211 **CR:** (laughing) Nooo...
212

213 **FD:** I came here in 1969...there were three of us in the department at that point. Sister
214 Cledovia Locket was chairman, and Warren Peelage a birdman, an ornithologist was
215 here, and I was the third one, faculty member in Biology. Sister Cledovia handled the
216 pre-med, pre-dent, pre-health professions at that time. And then she passed away, I’ll
217 never forgive her for dying. (laughing) She passed away in her eighties, in ninety-four, in
218 July of ninety-four she passed away. I helped out with pre-med advising. Billie Graham
219 was the fourth faculty member who came on well after I did; he helped out with pre-med
220 advising. So we got to know a lot about it. Sister Clo was an exemplary teacher, and
221 adviser, researcher, the whole can of worms. And so, Bill and I learned from her
222 unofficial mentorship about advising, and about the medical professions. When she
223 passed away...she should have passed away on the job...students kept coming to us. No
224 one ever talked to Bill or myself. There was no administrative “do you guys want to take
225 over?” No. None of that. Students just kept coming into the office. But, you know, Sister
226 had unfortunately passed away, but they kept coming into the office, and they would
227 come to see Bill and myself. That sounds like UD.
228

229 **CR:** Uh-huh, that’s what I was just about to say. The spirit of UD. There you have it.

230 **FD:** It sounds like UD, you know, unofficial...and then Bill passed away at fifty-three,
231 fifty-four years old from a form of cancer. So that's how I got the job.
232
233 **CR:** Wonderful.
234
235 **FD:** No one else picked it.
236
237 **CR:** No one else chose it. It was thrust upon them.
238
239 **FD:** The students just kept coming.
240
241 **CR:** For good reason...now we are rated really high on a list of pre-med, pre-health
242 programs, yes?
243
244 **FD:** Yeah, yep...
245
246 **CR:** What do you enjoy most about advising the students who come through your office,
247 needing advice?
248
249 **FD:** One of the things I most appreciate is when they come back. And a lot of them take a
250 gap year after being students. But I appreciate their informing us that they've been
251 successful, that they've gotten into medical school, they've gotten into dental school,
252 physician's assistant, PT, nursing school. We really appreciate them coming back and
253 telling us in their own way...saying thank you...that's a neat part of the job. And so
254 many of them are successful because...they have developed those nice qualities that I
255 mentioned earlier...but a work ethic to succeed. And they succeed in professional school.
256 And I adore it. The older I've gotten, the more I appreciate teaching. I don't know what it
257 is. And the more I appreciate teaching and the more I appreciate advising these young
258 people...And you know, with a little bit of practice, and grace, after a while, the words
259 automatically come out. Sometimes I wonder, "Where did that come from?" I think
260 God's grace. It comes. I hope so.
261
262 **CR:** I know so. And of course, you, just like the students, are as virtuous as them...
263
264 **FD:** (laughing) Oh, I didn't say that.
265
266 **CR:** We can't be formed by non-virtuous people, we have to be formed by virtuous people
267 as well, to become who we are supposed to be.
268
269 **CR:** One thing I had a question about is how the core curriculum has affected your
270 biology students, if you've seen that it has affected them and their repertoire of
271 knowledge, expertise in the field...what it gives them...
272
273 **FD:** We talk a lot about that at UD, trying to advertise about the core and the liberal arts
274 education. And of course, I include, as most people do, science as part of the liberal arts.
275 So we have the humanities and the sciences. One of the things that I see in our science

276 majors, in particular biology and biochemistry...these are the people I get to know best.
277 They learn how to write. I hope they do, because the humanities teachers (laughing)
278 require a lot of writing for you young guys...

279
280 **CR:** For sure

281
282 **FD:** And, and it works...they don't learn to write as well as the people I see in Basic
283 Ideas, for some reason or another. And I guess one would expect, you see English majors
284 and you think, well shouldn't they write better? They should write better. You see
285 philosophy majors, and shouldn't they write better? They should probably write better.
286 You see, some of these other disciplines probably require more writing, undoubtedly,
287 than we do, in science. But anyways, it really helps science majors. They hardly write
288 sentences, and you see later on, how most of them improved greatly. So I see that.

289
290 **FD:** You know, as you have said this, a lot of our students are pre-meds. One of our pre-
291 meds, Kathleen Widdington... a number of years ago, a bright gal, she came through here,
292 one of her sisters was an education major, as a teacher... anyway, Kathleen said when she
293 went to medical school... well how did her UD education help? Well the first years of
294 med school have changed a little bit... back when she went to med school, lots and lots of
295 facts, photographic memory... (aside) so jealous of those people. Kathleen said those first
296 two years... UD education, did it help? Yeah, she was appreciative of all the
297 science... blah blah blah... But you know, multiple choice tests, that sort of thing... we're
298 not big on those at UD in most courses. Don't get a lot of practice... Yeah, yeah it helped.
299 She appreciated.

300
301 **FD:** But she said when she got to third year, her UD education... liberal arts
302 education... really came to the floor when she dealt with folks, when she dealt with
303 patients and had to draw on all the information, or some of the information, that she
304 learned in her first two years. She said she was able to do that. She was able to integrate.
305 She had people skills. I don't know if we teach that at UD. Can it be taught? I don't
306 know.

307
308 **CR:** (laughing)

309
310 **FD:** You guys in education can talk about that. I don't know. But, she said that her third
311 year when she dealt with patients, when she was out in the clinics, she thought her UD
312 education somehow really helped her over the education in other schools.

313
314 **CR:** Interesting.

315
316 **FD:** Another student... these are concrete and special examples... one of the students
317 came from Wisconsin a number of years ago... Tom was a biochemistry major here.
318 Grade Point Average not very competitive. About a 3.1. Good GPA, but for medical
319 school, not competitive. But he had a fantastic MCAT score. He just blew it out of the
320 water. One of the highest we had seen at that time. So the med schools would say what's
321 going on? And you know, I know what they are thinking... when you see a high MCAT

322 score, and low grades, you say...lazy. Anyway, that's the conclusion. And they're not to
323 keen on that. He tried for fifteen years to get into medical school. Fifteen years. He didn't
324 apply every year, but every other year, he applied fifteen years later... He worked in
325 computers, made some money, became a Texas resident...He did some things, but he
326 went for an interview at Texas Tech for med school. And when he walked into the
327 interview, there was something on the monitor, and the interviewer had a painting up, a
328 photo, on the computer. He had been looking at it. And it wasn't a set up deal. He was
329 engrossed in this painting and Tom walked in for his interview, and the guy said, "have
330 you ever seen this before?" And I don't know whether it was Picasso or Remoire...I
331 don't know what it was...and Tom said, "Yeah, yeah I've seen that, and the artist is blah
332 blah blah blah..." And he started talking about the painting. I'm convinced, I'm
333 convinced, that guy was impressed. And Tom got into Texas Tech med school and did
334 fine. And he's a physician.

335

336 **CR:** That's a neat story.

337

338 **FD:** So when I hear pre-med students say, "Aww geez, we've got to take this fine arts
339 course"...I mean, it's a great course to take in Rome, I don't hear that from people who
340 have gone to Rome... (laughing)

341

342 **CR:** (laughing) Yeah, yeah stop complaining, right?

343

344 **FD:** I never hear it if they've gone to Rome...but sometimes I hear it if they are here. I
345 often tell them that story.

346

347 **CR:** I'm sure that changes their mind on some things...

348

349 **FD:** So sometimes there's some very practical aspects too...of learning this stuff

350

351 **CR:** Certainly. Now you were the dean of Constantin College at one point, yes?

352

353 **FD:** Yeah. Five years.

354

355 **CR:** Five years?

356

357 **FD:** Yes. I was the first dean of Constantin College.

358

359 **CR:** Were you?

360

361 **FD:** We didn't have one; we didn't have a dean of Constantin College until then.

362

363 **CR:** What brought you to that position?

364

365 **FD:** The administration.

366

367 **CR:** (laughing)

368 **FD:** I did not want it. Glen Perot called me and said “we would like you to be the Dean
369 of Constantin College”...I said no, because we have too many administrators now. And
370 it’s costing us too much money. We have too many people in administration. So no.

371
372 **CR:** That’s a bold statement.

373
374 **FD:** And he said, “Well Frank,...” He said, “Look, if you don’t take it, I’m gonna give it
375 to somebody else...” So he said we’re gonna spend this money. Well, I had no answer for
376 that. So I said okay, I’ll do the best I can. And, Edna...I don’t know if you know
377 Edna...she is fantastic.

378
379 **CR:** Uh-huh...oh, yes...

380
381 **FD:** And I had two associate deans...Claudia, who was getting or had her PhD from the
382 institute of philosophical studies here...and then Kathleen came in. Great associates. And
383 you know what was eye-opening to me...probably not eye-opening to you students, but it
384 was to me...see I’ve been affiliated...a lot of my connections were with biology majors,
385 biochemistry majors...and in general, after freshman year, pretty focused bunch. Pre-
386 meds, pre-dents...didn’t have major problems. If they did have major problems, they
387 didn’t tell me, because they wanted to get into professional school. But all of a sudden in
388 that job, I saw lots and lots of students who had issues. Who had real problems. And there
389 were things that were probably going on...suicide, kids attempting suicide...I don’t think
390 anybody succeeded in those five years. So depression. Girls being stalked. Pregnancy
391 issues. Parental questions... and anyway, one thing after another.

392
393 **FD:** So Dr. Cowan, the early president, had once said, in writing maybe, that the
394 University of Dallas...we all need to accept normal students, normal people. I think I
395 believed that, until I got into that job. And then I said, “No, that’s not true. We have kids
396 who have lots and lots of problems. Just like out there in society. We’re not immune.
397 That was a real eye-opener. One of the best things that we did, Claudia and myself and
398 Kathleen who was admin...we got from Jan a number of students who hadn’t
399 graduated...they were missing two or three courses, and some of them hadn’t graduated
400 for some time...we got a list, and we contacted those people. We said, “Let’s get their
401 degree finished. Let’s finish it up. Let’s see what we can do.” We contacted some
402 teachers, see if we can take these two or three courses, and make arrangements. So we
403 had a number of students who finished their degrees during this.

404
405 **CR:** That’s a really neat project to take on.

406
407 **FD:** Yeah, yeah...it’s so frustrating...for them, and for the registrar...(laughing)

408
409 **CR:** (laughing)...

410
411 **FD:** To have these people...for one reason or another.

412
413 **CR:** Wow. That’s a pretty neat experience you had then, as a dean.

414 **FD:** Yeah, it was for the most part, it had its rocky bumps, but that's what happens when
415 you become an administrator.

416
417 **CR:** Yeah, you do a lot of the excess work, out of class work... One thing I was
418 wondering as you're talking about it... it seems that you're very personable when you
419 teach. And it led me to think about your personal life and how teaching has affected your
420 personal life, or how being dean has affected you personally...

421
422 **FD:** My wife and two daughters... I can't remember anything negative... they are always
423 so encouraging. If I have to come in on a Saturday or Sunday or get up early for my eight
424 o'clock classes, and get dressed in the dark, I never got any static in my life about that. I
425 think part of it... they have a high respect for education. I think that's part of it. And what
426 we do in the colleges and universities, they respect.

427
428 **FD:** Well I'll tell you what... the first number of years I was here, I really didn't
429 appreciate what I was doing. I didn't really appreciate my family, and I didn't appreciate
430 teaching or doing research. Because I got drunk everyday. And students really helped me
431 through this in their own way. But a number of people on campus and a large number of
432 people off campus, and the grace of God... after a number of years here, I got sober. It
433 changed my life. That was a... that still is a game changer. So fortunately no one ever told
434 me what I told that student. None of those people ever told me I was hopeless. So if
435 anybody ever listens to this tape, and have any kind of addiction... they should
436 be... hopeful. There is hope here. June of ninety-seven... That was a big day, a big
437 month...

438
439 **FD:** I think we better quit.

440
441 **CR:** I think that's a good idea. I think we did good here. Thank you so much for
442 everything.

443
444 **FD:** Good seeing you!

445
446 **CR:** Thank you for listening to my questions and hearing them and then responding so
447 lovely. It was a good time today.