Eva Maria Carne interview

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CWU LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

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Lowther: Today we are interviewing Eva Maria Carne who served in the Foreign Language department at Central and the interviewer is Larry Lowther and running the equipment is Helen Smith. Eva, before we get to Central I would like to have you just tell us a little bit about your personal background, where you were born, something about your family, your education, and your career before coming to Central.

Carne: Well, I was born in East Germany and my father was of Jewish extraction so we were very lucky to get out of Nazi Germany and did most of my schooling in England. I studied German and French at university there. I got my bachelor’s and taught at high schools in England and as an exchange teacher in Austria and Germany teaching English as a Second Language. Then I won a fellowship to go to the University of Colorado at Boulder, to go to graduate school. So I got there in, let’s see, 1963-68. Got my Master’s and PhD and succeeded in getting a job at Central Washington State College to teach German. That was in ‘68.

Lowther: That was in ‘68 when you arrived at Central. What year did you retire?

Carne: Do you know, I can’t remember because I went on phased retirement so something like - what have we got - so I suppose it was ‘93.

Lowther: Now, when you came to Central, what was your academic assignment?

Carne: To teach all levels - all levels of German language and literature at Central.

Lowther: Okay, and your beginning rank was?

Carne: Beginning rank, let’s see. What’s the step before full professor?

Lowther: Well, there is associate and assistant.

Carne: Yes, so I was appointed as assistant because they counted all of my former years of teaching.

Lowther: What was your rank when you retired?

Carne: Full professor.

Lowther: Okay. I know you served under a lot of administrators during your career. Are there any incidents concerning administrators that stand out to you?

Carne: Yes. At the end of my first year here in 1969 Dr. Golden retired as the Chairman of the Foreign Language department and a new chairman was appointed whose name was Dwight Chambers. The committee that interviewed him over the telephone looked at his recommendations, neglected in phoning any of the people who had written recommendations. When he came here, my first impression - my first look of him was there was his glint in his eyes which reminded me of the Gestapo in Germany. I was afraid of him from the start. He had already started criticizing members of the department before he actually took over in September. There had been some problems and disagreements and so on and so forth. He called me in Colorado where I was on vacation and said could I come to a meeting early in September and I said well I had made definite plans. I was house sitting for a friend who was abroad and I wasn’t planning to return until the middle of September. He sounded a bit impatient about that so I thought well I would try and make a friendly remark saying I was sorry there had been some disagreements and problems at the start and
he flew into a violent fury. Started attacking me saying very impolite things and started shrieking into the telephone, which was most disturbing because I felt that I hadn’t done anything to cause this. Well, anyway, when I came back on September 15, I found over 60 messages to members of the department in my mailbox. He decided he’d come in August and he almost everyday he wrote some message. On one day at the end of August I counted them because I kept a file and I hadn’t thrown these things away - eleven on one day in the end of August. Topics, policies and procedures, which I suppose were important, the new secretary, how to pay for the coffee (how we were to pay for the coffee we drank), the file system. This sort of took my breath away. We were all at this stage already apprehensive. We had our first department meeting and he got terribly impatient with several of my colleagues and friends whose English was perhaps a little limited still and he said, ‘How are we ever going to get through a meeting like this?’ So, I’m to refer to my notes because I don’t want to leave out any of this. I do feel it’s worth recording in the history of the university and the college. We heard later that his family had tried to get him committed to a mental home for treatment and that he had just stayed for a week or maybe a maximum of three weeks and checked himself out. I mentioned his call to me. He had also called other people. In fact, his long distance calls had mounted up just in the first three months before school started to hundreds of dollars. I have a letter here from Dean Martin who was Dean of Arts and Sciences pointing this out to Chambers, that he had far exceeded the amount allowed to the department on these calls. One thing I don’t want to forget, there was a French professor with whom Chambers had had a disagreement and so on the schedule he gave him a class at eight in the morning, another one in the middle of the day and the third class adding up to fifteen hours, I think he was either at four p.m. or even in the evening and Jack Wachs objected to this but Chambers would not back off. That was just an incredible act at the beginning of his services as chairman. His impatience and rudeness were just unbelievable. He would arrange to go out with some of the men in the evening, drink a glass of beer, and start criticizing the women. To somebody he said he felt he had been hired to staff or to service three menopausal women in the department. Or he took out a very attractive woman French professor and apart from criticizing me (I was in his bad books from the start because of that remark that I said I was sorry there had been trouble at the beginning) and he said that he’d had a letter from my publisher complaining about the silly material I kept submitting and at that stage I hadn’t actually submitted an article to anybody that - I had one article actually published, but I hadn’t submitted any. My doctoral thesis had been accepted for publication as a book in Germany but I hadn’t sent in any more material. So, then I - the turning point for me was that a student - I think her field was French - I was told by Ilda Easterling, who taught French, about this student and the student happened to be coming down the steps and Ilda said listen to her story. She had gone to ask something about a class - gone to ask Dr. Chambers and he said sit down and she hadn’t sat down so he pushed her down by her shoulders - pushed her into the chair. Apparently grabbed her so hard that her husband indeed found a mark on her shoulder and he’d also ranted and raved while he was talking to her and she and her husband wrote a letter and complained to the administration. Well, some way or another Chambers heard that some of us had listened to this student and were inclined to believe this student and so that was one of his grounds later for suing us for slander. He wrote a letter to this young woman’s parents totally insulting, blaming them for the way they raised her. Calling her all kinds of names and he would use bathroom language that I had to turn my head. Excuse me, I have to drink some water. In the letters he wrote to us, to our families and so on. All right. By October, several of us had gotten together and said, ‘We don’t have to put up with this. We’ve got to do something about this.’ So we decided to meet one evening at Christian Schneider’s home, Christian Schneider is still teaching German, and most people, most members of the department, went along. Some people for various reasons didn’t have the courage. We told them about it but they didn’t show up. The majority of us were there. We sang international songs and had some refreshments and then we got some legal advice and so we all signed the petition for review of the effectiveness of the chairman of the department of Foreign Languages and our aim was to ask for his resignation and to point out to the administration what had been going on. There were other students, obviously, who had come to complain. So that was in October and on Monday, November the 10th, Veteran’s Day, we were all asked to stay in town to be individually questioned. There was a legal hearing. Present were Dean Martin, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Del Leash, Thomas Dalglish who was then the college attorney, Dale Comstock as the faculty observer, and then Chambers and his Seattle attorney, Kenneth McDonald. We were questioned individually and I said exactly what I had experienced from the start. That I felt that I couldn’t go on working and doing a good job, fulfilling my duties, in a situation like this. So, it took some time but then he was asked by the college to retire. His resignation took place on December 31st and I do not have written proof of this, but if I remember correctly, the college paid him for the full year and another year because he
collected his two year amount. Then we received the summons to the Superior Court of Kittitas County for the suit or the being accused of libel and slander and Chambers demanded $900,000 for the fact that his character had been maligned, his dignity had been ruined, his family had been hurt, and so on. I’m pretty certain his wife had divorced him and his children didn’t want to have any more dealings with him. But we found all this out too late. I have in my file, and I have quite a file here because I kept all of the documents. Probably all of us are - as far as all of us were concerned - our families received offensive, rude, really upsetting letters about us accusing us of all kinds of things. And also our alma maters received letters. So Francoise was the young attractive French woman, I don’t know whether she moved on to Wesley College - is that how you pronounce it? Or whether it was she had been there before she had joined us. I think she was over at Fulbright. Anyhow, I have a letter here in my file - a letter from Chambers in October 1970. So the year after he had been here accusing her as slanderous of what he calls of strutting and pointing out that he had written a letter to the Immigration and Naturalization office demanding her deportation back to France. That he had written to all of the French and American offices in Paris that had any connection with her to tell them what a terrible woman she was and the crimes she had committed. He sent me a copy of a letter he claims to have sent my parents and I can’t remember whether they ever received this or not. Anyway, containing vile accusations, bathroom terminology and pointing out he presumed that my parents were Jewish, which actually is not at all a fact. My father converted to Christianity when he married my mother. Anyhow, he points that slanderers like me would have been stoned in Old Testament times. He found out that I was a member of the Episcopal Church, so he wrote a letter, or telephoned, or both to the bishop of Spokane pointing out that people like me would be burnt at the stake and they finally, because he pestered them for so long, received a letter in fact a copy which was sent to Reverend Nurding, a minister of the Episcopal Church in town, pointing out what a terrible female I was. But anyhow, he received - that’s right - he received a letter from - a copy of the letter the Bishop wrote to Chambers about this business of burning somebody at the stake and they said that the practice had been discontinued some time ago. Well, Nurding, the Reverend Nurding, defended me in some form or the other and this incensed Chambers so much that he demanded - what did he call Nurding? Oh yes, he calls him the rascal Nurding, the Nurding creature should be expelled from the ministry and he claims that I, Eva Came, had been convicted at an administrative hearing of libel and slander. I was now a co-defendant in a million dollar libel suit. I neglected to point out that the suit was withdrawn by Chambers’ attorney because he found out that in fact it was an extreme case of paranoia. The chairman of the German department of the University of Colorado where I had obtained my degrees, Hugo Schmidt, sent me a copy of the letter he received claiming that Eva Carne, by one means or the other, procured her doctorate. He claims that I slandered him with a student - this French student was concerned - and said that he didn’t even know this student and that he had offered to drop the suit against me if I would agree to go to a mental institution. Yes, another letter received by the German department at the University of Colorado on June 28, 1971. He calls me an apparent whore who had attempted to turn the Foreign Language department into a fecal cesspool and must have found my model in the German department in Boulder, Colorado. Well, there’s more bathroom terminology in the letter to me received in ’71, two years after he had been here. But I do have a letter written to the governor of the state of Washington, Dan Evans, dated November 3, 1970. Also to Brooks, but Brooks was never there to answer his telephone understandably when Chambers called. This letter to Dan Evans has 53 copies at the bottom, a cc, a list of 53 people, college administrators and chairs and a bishop in Spokane, and anybody he dealt with and I think this is worth quoting the way it appears in the letter. ‘Central Washington State College is a cesspool of slander. One dean told me that the only thing that would clean that place up would be a couple of libel suits.’ This is of course written after taking the suit. He doesn’t admit that the suit was dropped. Well, that letter was 1970 but the other offensive letters we received in the summer of ’71 and then we heard that his body had been found. I have a copy - I mean, two cuts here from the Ellensburg Daily Record. Tenth of September, 1971, and I haven’t gotten the date on the second one. ‘Body May Be Former Central Washington State College Man’. His body was found by two sheep herders that papers on the body showed who he was and then later it was confirmed by the F.B.I. by his fingerprints. That’s the end of my story. I can read out the whole statement by the Daily Record that I pointed out a number of facts in. It’s, it’s a sad story of somebody who was really really sick and it shows that you can be mentally disturbed and yet partly lead a reasonably normal life. Behind the intelligent, you had quite a list of complications. Another thing though, that the committee that appointed him had neglected to do was to seriously take note of the fact that he had stayed only one year at the various places where he had served in the last few years. One year here, one year there, one here, move, move, move, All right, that’s the end of my story about Chambers.
Lowther: He was actually on duty here one quarter, is that right?

Carne: Yes, one quarter.

Lowther: But he continued to write these letters that stirred things up for another couple of years?

Carne: Yes, that’s right.

Lowther: And how did all of this affect your teaching and the teaching of other members of the department?

Carne: Well, I for one, I don’t know that it affected my teaching. I was disturbed but I tried to not think about it with my classes. We had this terrific moral support from each other. There was a wonderful feeling of unity.

Lowther: It actually brought the department closer together.

Carne: It certainly did. I mean - officially he took over in September and we had our meeting deciding that we weren’t going to put up with it already in the middle of October so when I applied for work at other - I started applying - I had an interview in Rhode Island, went to the Modern Language Conference right after Christmas which happened to be in New York.

Lowther: Did anyone in the department actually leave? Get another job as a result of that?

Carne: No, we were thinking about it but fortunately –

Lowther: ?

Carne: Yes. I liked it here. I still do.

Lowther: Well, I’m not going to ask you, ‘Can you top this?’ Do you have any other remembrances of chairs of your department that you would like to share?

Carne: Not anything really that –

Lowther: Positive or negative?

Carne: Well I think since then we’ve just had a series of great chairmen.

Lowther: And has the close relation - did the close relationship among members of the department continue on after that?

Carne: They certainly did between the people who had been involved in signing this. There was tension between us and Dr. Golden because she had tried to support Chambers. She had admitted that he did have a furious temper. She said that on one occasion she had just slammed down the receiver and later he had apologized but she never accepted what had happened to this one student, for instance, and so there was some great tension there. It was never fully resolved.

Lowther: Was there any tension between those of you who had walked out on a limb and had signed the petition and those who had not?
Carne: No, because we understood. One of them was Dr. Golden and I’m not even sure that we told her we were going to meet. There was Dr. Valdespino who was from Cuba and felt very insecure so we understood why he didn’t come. Although on the other hand Carlos Martin, who is still teaching Spanish, was at the time stateless. He was Spanish. He had gotten out of the Franco regime that his entire family was still in Spain. He had been accepted at the University in Chicago. Married. Had children. So he was stateless but I still see and it sort of moves me to tears, still, looking at the document, pausing, taking the pen and having the courage to sign.

Lowther: Thinking over the years that you served here, are there any of your colleagues that particularly stand out in your memory?

Carne: Well, I think my colleague Christian Schneider is exceptional because he is a great pianist and a great organist and he got his master’s in music while he was here. Henry Eickhoff was also an organist. Since then Christian has been to various European countries and is invited to play the organ including Notre Dame in Paris. We had quite a crowd who attended. Also Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy for the first time this summer. He certainly comes to mind.

Lowther: Okay, you served quite a while at Central from ‘68 until ‘93 at least. You have been here 25 years. Did you notice any change over the years in terms of the students?

Carne: Well, of course there was the hippie era where drugs played such an big role and at least in my own classes there was less and less of that. Students would come to class with glazed eyes. You’d get invited to parties with faculty and students where in some corner there faculty could smell marijuana. There was a time and in fact more and more so with the students I had who were seriously interested in studying and weren’t just coming here for a job. But then people who study German usually do it because they are interested in the language or because there is a family history or because they’ve served in the army and so on. So it’s different reasons. They weren’t ever so - let me get out of here with my degree so I can earn some money.

Lowther: Did you notice any change in any academic qualifications or the intellectual abilities of your students over time or did they seem pretty steady?

Carne: I don’t know that there was that much difference. What has always struck me is how differently they have been prepared if they had studied German at high school. Quite a number of my students have had a foreign language. First of all, they cover very little ground that it’s almost like three years - or one year at high school equals one quarter at the university level. But those who had had German before or not, the amazing thing was the difference between high schools. Some had really received an education, a good one. Had good general knowledge. I just - I know several colleagues from other departments who pointed out this but I have never had experience with that.

Lowther: Okay. Now you served under various provosts and presidents and so on. Did any of those people stand out to you?

Carne: Well, I liked some better than others but I don’t know if I want to say anything that is of historic significance.

Lowther: Okay. When you came here, of course, as you said in the Hippie Era also the Vietnam Era and still I suppose the Civil Rights Era, do you recall any events at Central that relate to those particular eras. Anything that the college was involved in?

Carne: Not anything, again, that is really worth recording.

Lowther: Okay, and let’s see. Did you have any dealings with the Board of Trustees.
Carne: No.

Lowther: Okay. Were you very much aware of them at all?

Carne: Well, I did serve as acting chairman for one year while Rosco Tolman was on sabbatical and so I did get involved much more than I had been before. We were asked to give our views about the appointment of the new president and I felt our views were completely ignored and I did - I was one of the people who signed the letter complaining about Rose - what was her name? Who served on the Board of Trustees. (laughs)

Lowther: That’s all right. Do you remember what year that was? Approximately.

Carne: What was it? I retired in ‘93? Let’s see, this is ‘95, ‘94, ‘93. It was either the year ending ‘93 or probably the years ending ‘92 that I served as acting chair.

Lowther: Okay.

Carne: We objected to the role she played.

Lowther: Do you have any recollection of differences - important differences between the teaching faculty and the administrators?

Carne: Sometimes. Sometimes we picked up that the administration was out of touch. That the teaching faculty were ignored but my own personal experience nearly always has proved otherwise.

Lowther: How would you characterize the morale of the faculty? And if you just want to talk in terms of your own moral that’s fine over the years that you served here.

Carne: Well, it goes - it’s gone up and down. When there was the - what did we call it - riffing, and a number of people lost their jobs people felt insecure. That was a very difficult year. And then for a few years morale picked up again and it’s been very very low during the present administration but again I’ve heard this Fall that things really have improved. That faculty is being listened to more and the whole atmosphere is on the way up.

Lowther: Do you recall any significant differences between students and faculty?

Carne: Any difficulties?

Lowther: Yeah. Differences or difficulties.

Carne: Well, I know that, for instance, when I was chairing a student came and complained about a sexual harassment or at least offensive in some form of a member of the faculty and I said go and see Nancy Howard and go and see your student advisor and I heard no more about it so. And occasionally heard something. I got tired of this stress on sexual harassment. I am not a fanatic feminist and the fact that you were supposed to keep your door open when you talked to students I suppose was wise. You weren’t supposed to touch them, well I’m a natural toucher. (laughs)

Lowther: Do you have - is it your impression that the problem of sexual harassment has been somewhat over emphasized?

Carne: Yes.
Lowther: Did you serve on any campus-wide committees?

Carne: Yes, I did because I had to. I don’t like serving on committees but you do learn quite a lot about the whole system and it makes you more responsible. I was on the Curriculum Committee for a while and I was - let’s see - was it called the All College Curriculum Committee and that is a terrific amount of work. It was as much work at least in those days as teaching a class because you’ve got all these files that you need to read through that were handed by the chair and you had to study and research.

Lowther: Were there any outstanding issues?

Carne: Can’t remember.

Lowther: Okay. Were you - did you serve on any other committees?

Carne: Oh yes, quite a bunch.

Lowther: Were you on the Teacher Ed. Committee?

Carne: Let’s see, what was the one chaired by Don Schliesman? It was not the Curriculum Committee, it was the –

Lowther: That’s okay.

Carne: Yes, I just don’t have anything interesting about committees.

Lowther: Okay. Did you have many dealings with the teacher training program? I know you had taught in high school for a while.

Carne: Yes I did. I did teach a class on teaching foreign languages. One or two of those. It’s very important. It was not my degree and activity. I think that if you’ve taught you should share your experiences and give advice and students need that.

Lowther: Were you pleased with the teacher training program as far as it related to foreign language.

Carne: Yes, I was. I’ve remembered one committee that I had to serve on that - with you in the History department. That might interest Larry Lowther.

Lowther: Yeah. (laughs)

Carne: And I felt it was a shocking waste of time.

Lowther: The History department was? (laughs)

Carne: Not in the slightest. I believe History is very important. But just the way we were asked and I don’t know whether this is still going on to review each others departments. The poor History department had to turn out pages and pages of material and we had to wade through that and I just felt that really the great majority do their job. The chairs check that the job is done well and this just wasn’t necessary.

Lowther: Let me go down through a series of terms and if any of these things ring a bell respond to them if you will.

Carne: All right.
Lowther: Salary schedule?

Carne: I never know how much I earn or get so I really didn’t spend much time on that.

Lowther: Faculty codes?

Carne: I’ve left that to Beverly Heckert.

Lowther: Academic freedom?

Carne: I felt we did have it.

Lowther: The legislature?

Carne: Sometimes I disagree with their views.

Lowther: Do you have the impression that the legislature properly supported the college and university?

Carne: From time to time yes and at times no. I think our present government really does want to support education.

Lowther: The Faculty Senate.

Carne: I avoided it where I possibly could. I went a few times and the trouble is that people tend to take over who love to hear their own voice. It’s necessary. I think we need a faculty senate and am glad that some people really care to serve on it but it’s that sort of group that attracts people who like to talk.

Lowther: Town/gown relationship?

Carne: I think that unless you belonged to a particular group like a church or some other club it is rather difficult. One can live in an ivory tower if one chooses and it is very tempting to because you get home and you are tired and I just sort of like silence. (laughs)

Lowther: Do you think there was a pretty good feeling between university people and townsfolk?

Carne: I really don’t think it’s bad. Certainly the professionals come and attend university functions. My doctor, for instance, is chair of the Madrigal Feast or was and Laughing Horse Theater. My pharmacist comes to most of the plays from Downtown Pharmacy and so on. More the country people, ranchers and so on, probably - I’ve not met any hostility but I think there is a distance there.

Lowther: Okay. Long range planning?

Carne: I don’t believe in it. (laughs) I mean - you know - strategic plans, five year plans. There is presidents who’ve tried it. Hitler always had a four year plan and it just doesn’t work. I mean, I’m exaggerating, you have to do some planning but these demands of pages and pages of plans and reviews and what have you are shocking and disgusting wastes of time.

Lowther: The academic organization of the university?

Carne: Well, my only criticism would be that we seem to have acquired more and more instead of less and less administrators and then tried to save money and gained administrators.
Lowther: Hiring policies?

Carne: They seem all right except in the case of Chambers.

Lowther: Okay. (laughs) All right.

Carne: There are occasional wrongs and slip ups.

Lowther: Publish or perish?

Carne: We don’t, at least, I never experienced it. I enjoyed writing the occasional paper and attending conferences but I never felt pressure to do this.

Lowther: Than you never felt pressure.

Carne: Never.

Lowther: Do you feel there is more of an emphasis upon teaching in the college and university that there is upon research?

Carne: Yes, at least in my experience.

Lowther: Were you a recipient of any awards or honors that you would like to share with us?


Lowther: What do you think is your special contribution to Central.

Carne: I think I was a good teacher being native German helped but also having learned English as a second language helped me to understand the problem of acquiring a second language. Having taught many years before coming here I had learned major difficulties and how to handle them and how to help students cope with them.

Lowther: Are there any programs or activities on campus that you feel are not justified on a university campus.

Carne: Nothing I can point a finger to.

Lowther: Is there anything else that you would just like to tell us about your experience here at Central.

Carne: I haven’t - I guess I should have thought about this before hand but I just expected to tell my story about Dr. Chambers.

Lowther: It was a very good story.

Carne: So, you can switch off the cassette because I need to think. You can switch off –

Lowther: Yeah, I don’t want to put any pressure on you.

Carne: Yeah, I hate to miss out on something.
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