

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Emeriti: Annual of Retired WKU English Faculty!* When Dr. Angie Jones asked me if I had a newsletter assignment in mind for her editing and publishing class, I immediately thought of the wonderful work that our retired faculty are doing. One of the unexpected pleasures of my new job as department head at WKU has been getting to know so many of our retired faculty and learning about their lives and careers. I knew from my interview what a great group of professors I would work with on a daily basis, but it hadn't occurred to me that they must have been hired by an equally fine group of teachers.

As you will soon learn, they are a busy bunch with rich, productive, and fulfilling lives. On the work front, they volunteer in their communities, publish poetry, and write scholarly articles; on the personal front, they hike in the great outdoors, travel to interesting locations, and savor time with family and friends. This issue of *Emeriti* represents a small taste of what our retired colleagues are doing, and we'll look forward to sharing more stories about other retirees next year.

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Dr. Karen Schneider

“When I originally moved here to earn my master’s degree—just like the song ‘Rocky Mountain High’—I felt as though I was reborn.”

A View from the Mountain

—Chela Counts

Photo Submitted by Dr. Schneider

Dr. Karen Schneider knew she'd return to the magnificent mountainous region of Colorado after retiring from Western Kentucky University's English Department. “When I originally moved here to earn my master's degree—just like the song ‘Rocky Mountain High’—I felt as though I was reborn.”

Dr. Schneider's tenure at WKU was two-fold. For many years, she taught fiction, literature, and composition; later, she served as the English Department head. But the most exciting part of her career was developing the English Department's film studies program. Dr. Schneider says, “Film has become the dominant narrative in contemporary culture. I found it very important for students to know how to critically think about what they're viewing.”

After retiring in 2012, Dr. Schneider stayed connected with colleagues and students through her work as contributing editor and copyeditor for *Arts & Letters: The Magazine of Potter College at Western Kentucky University*. However, she says, “I've gotten so busy with volunteering and my other activities here that I've become too busy... [that's] one of the things you're supposed to get away from...so I've turned in my resignation from the magazine.”

For Dr. Schneider, volunteer work, travel, and outdoor activities are top priorities. “I love hiking, biking, and walking,” she says. “I'm getting ready to start vegetable gardening as well—but since the climate here in Colorado is semi-arid and water is scarce, my husband is building something for me that will enable my vegetables to get nourishment from an underground waterway system—because I love growing my own food.”

Although she misses her students and friends in Kentucky, Dr. Schneider is settling into her new stage of life. She says, “It was time for a new vision and Dr. Robert Hale has brought that.” Dr. Schneider is now at home among the blue skies and cathedral peaks of Colorado, where each day brings that Rocky Mountain high. ☘

A Passion for Scholarship

—Holly Logsdon

Photo Submitted by Western Kentucky University

Dr. Joseph Millichap is doing what he loves: reading, researching, and writing. It may not sound like retirement, but the former English Department head and author of seven books says, “I always had the idea of retiring relatively early and seeing it as another part of my career.”

A professor of American literature and expert on the Southern Renaissance, Dr. Millichap’s distinguished career spans forty years, half of which he spent in departmental administration. During his tenure at Western Kentucky University, he helped establish the creative writing program and the department’s current configuration of general education courses. As the founding director of the Center for Robert Penn Warren Studies, Dr. Millichap’s work continues to inspire WKU students.

A lifelong scholar, he has a variety of new projects underway. Dr. Millichap recently completed an online bibliography of Robert Penn Warren’s work for Oxford University Press and is currently writing a book about photography and Southern literature for LSU Press.

Last summer, Dr. Millichap’s essay, “‘Love and Knowledge’: Daughters and Fathers in Natasha Trethewey’s *Thrall*,” was featured in the *Southern Quarterly*, a prestigious journal of arts and letters. He serves on the journal’s editorial board and just picked up a new assignment to edit the upcoming 2014 edition.

Dr. Millichap still finds time to connect with students by teaching an occasional class at MTSU, where his wife, Pat Bradley, is also a professor of Southern literature. An active participant in his wife’s Faulkner/Warren seminar, Dr. Millichap acknowledges that the teaching profession has changed with the culture.

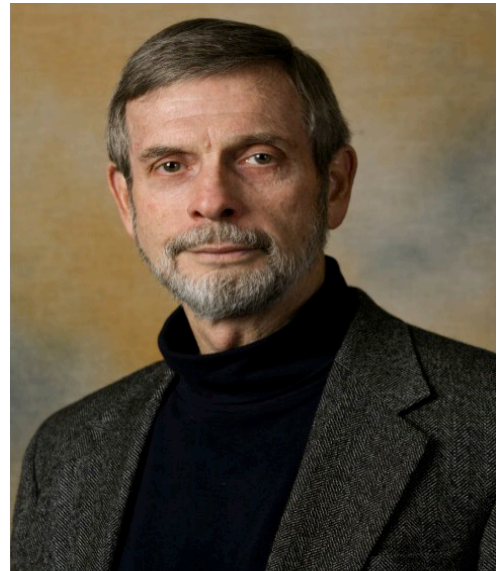
“When I came into teaching, it was a seller’s market,” he says. “I had a doctorate, and people reached out to me for job interviews. Now it’s a different world. You have to be willing to try new things, to freelance, and to be an entrepreneur. But if you’ve got an open mind and it’s what you really want, I still think it’s worth doing.”

Besides reading, writing, and photography, Dr. Millichap has been interested in railroading since boyhood. He also works out daily and runs competitively. Dr. Millichap enjoys keeping his mind and body active and plans on writing for several more years. His future projects include developing a retirement seminar for the South Atlantic Modern Language Association and writing a book about Robert Penn Warren’s poetic legacy to younger writers.

“You have a different canon of writers than fifty years ago when I was finishing graduate school,” Dr. Millichap says. “But in literature, you still want to have a sense of ‘what’s the meaning of this?’ and try to get other people to understand that, too. Meaning is important. It’s a shaping of life that you can take and apply to your own life.”

While writing *Robert Penn Warren after Audubon: The Work of Aging and the Quest for Transcendence in His Later Poetry*, Dr. Millichap reflected on his own life and legacy. “Retirement is just another stage—a mature stage when you have to face up to the fact that you’re not going to go on forever and what that means looking back at the life that you’ve led.”

In the meantime, it’s full speed ahead. ☘



Dr. Joseph Millichap

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Dr. James Flynn

“Think about your future, but don’t hyperventilate about it because futures tend to unroll in surprising ways.”

A Lesson in Strength

—Shelby Stribling

Photo Submitted by Dr. Flynn

Geoffrey Chaucer, best known for *The Canterbury Tales*, wrote, “[G]ladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.” Those are fine words to live by—words that former Western Kentucky University English professor Dr. James Flynn takes to heart.

Dr. Flynn graduated from WKU and began teaching here in 1972. During his successful tenure at WKU he taught a variety of English classes such as Survey of English Literature, an undergraduate survey of medieval literature, and several study abroad courses. Dr. Flynn says, “My particular love was teaching English literature.”

He also served as Head of the English Department and as the acting Interim Dean of the University College. In 1984 Dr. Flynn was awarded the University Public Service Award before co-authoring a writing handbook with fellow colleague Joe Glaser (published by The Macmillan Group).

Unfortunately, in the fall of 2011 Dr. Flynn was diagnosed with leukemia and was forced to resign from his teaching duties. He continued his administrative and editorial work, and after a forty-year career, fully retired from WKU in June 2012.

Dr. Flynn says the thing he misses most about working in the WKU English Department is the people. He fondly recalls working alongside his colleagues and teaching each generation of students.

Dr. Flynn recalls how much it meant to him when students showed interest in the subject matter and put forth an effort to be successful. “Some of my classroom experiences are truly memorable because of such students,” he says. “And I thank them for it.”

Dr. Flynn recently celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary with his wife Lana, and he is a proud father and grandfather. He and Lana are delighted that both of their children followed their father’s footsteps and work in the field of education. Dr. Flynn’s family loves to gather and spend time together. He cherishes not only the special occasions, but the everyday moments they share.

Because of chemotherapy treatments, Dr. Flynn’s plans for retirement had to be adjusted. “My primary focus since my retirement has been my health, dealing with the leukemia and its treatments.” However, his love for travel—dating back to his study abroad days—has proven much stronger than his leukemia. Dr. Flynn says, “In spite of my illness, my wife and I have been able to do some long-delayed travel in the U.S.” In the past year they have been fortunate to visit Yellowstone Park, Seattle, and San Francisco.

Dr. Flynn is also working on a genealogical project. So far he’s been able to trace his ancestral lineage to Ireland, while also learning about his great grandfather’s service as a Union soldier in the Civil War.

Despite his battle with cancer, Dr. Flynn remains positive and hopeful. He offers inspiration and encouragement to current WKU students. “Attending college is a privilege; don’t waste it. Think about your future, but don’t hyperventilate about it because futures tend to unroll in surprising ways. Know how to learn because you will be doing that the rest of your life.” ☘



Dr. Elizabeth Oakes

*“An owl hoots.
Something snarls.
Something further
in the forest sounds
like maniacal laughter.”*

A Voice In the Desert

—Samantha Tackett

Photo Submitted by Dr. Oakes

Dr. Elizabeth Oakes is spending her retirement exploring her passions: writing and enjoying the spectacular Arizona scenery. The former English professor recently moved to the “red rock country” of Sedona. Its breathtaking desert views provide the perfect inspiration for her writing.

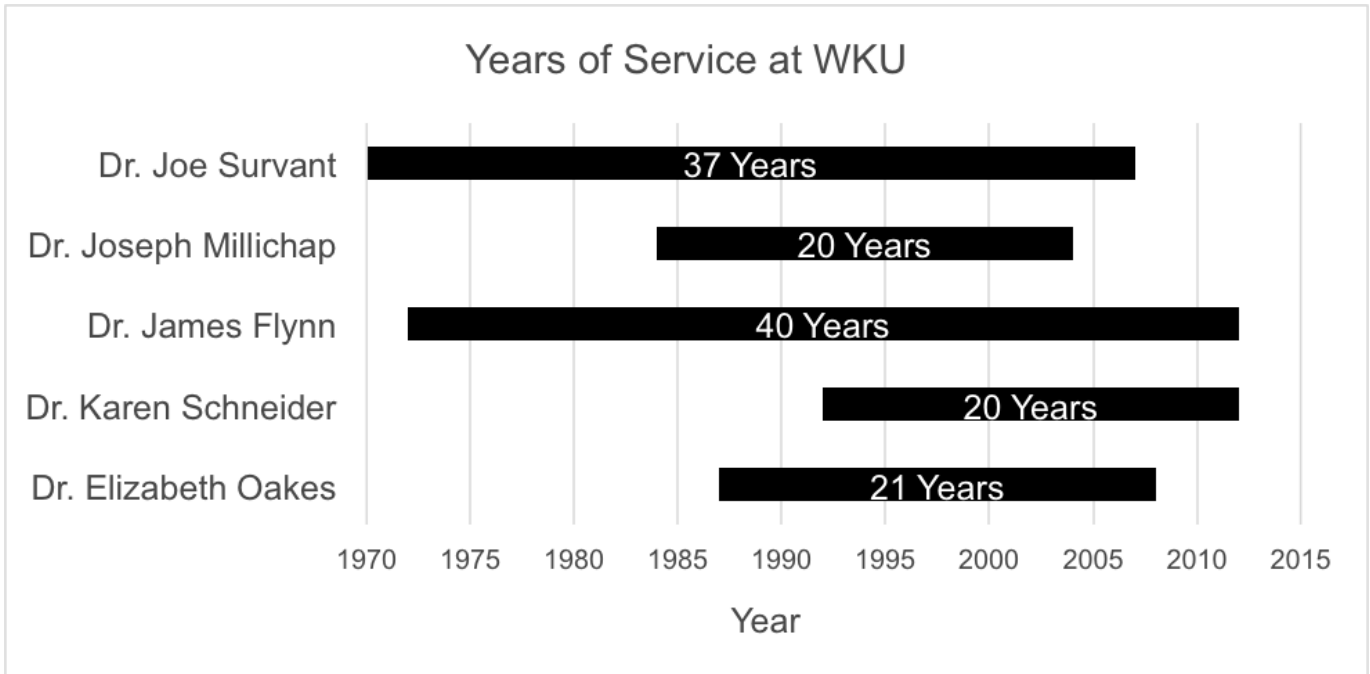
Since leaving Western Kentucky University’s English Department in 2008, Dr. Oakes has published two books of poetry. The first, *Mercy in the New World*, is a series of persona poems written in the voice of a colonial woman. Her second, *Leave Here Knowing*, is a book of poetry dealing with spiritual journeys, both actual and imagined.

One of her poems from *Mercy in the New World*, titled “Our New World”, begins with a pleasant image of the night but moves into something darker.

Dr. Oakes’ words flow brilliantly, creating a dark scene of America’s untamed new world from the eyes of a young woman. Inspiration seems to be everywhere. “I’m also influenced by art,” she says. “And I often write ekphrastic poems.” Currently, Dr. Oakes is writing poems based on the poetry of Pablo Neruda.

However, her writing has not made her forget her past love. For twenty-one years Dr. Oakes taught Shakespeare and women’s poetry at WKU. While reflecting on her time in the English Department, she says, “The English Department was an exciting and collegial place during that time, as I’m sure it is now.”

Her students have a special place in her heart. Dr. Oakes enjoys keeping up with them on Facebook and learning about their successes. “I loved every minute of it,” she says with a smile as she talks about her teaching days. “There never was a class in which I didn’t learn something from the students.” Now she lives a full life with her husband, continually writing and touching those around her with her words. ☘





Dr. Joe Survant

“To have this to come back to was an important factor in healing. I was able to re-immense myself in this and finish it up.”

An Enduring Devotion to Poetry

—Daniel Dutton

Photo Submitted by Dwight Pounds

Before his retirement in 2007, Dr. Joe Survant taught English for thirty-seven years at Western Kentucky University and traveled frequently during his time as Kentucky Poet Laureate. A poet at heart, Dr. Survant had little time to devote to his personal writing. Now that he’s retired, he has returned to his longtime love of poetry. His most recent work, *The Land We Dreamed: Poems*, is the culmination of a long journey, both personally and professionally. “I began it [in 2003], and then I was selected Poet Laureate. That went on for two years, and I was teaching during transitional retirement.”

While on hiatus from writing, Dr. Survant faced the devastating loss of his wife, Jeannie Survant, in 2010. His poetry helped him get through the difficult recovery process. Dr. Survant explains, “To have this to come back to was an important factor in healing. I was able to re-immense myself in this and finish it up.” To keep from dwelling on his loss, Dr. Survant began to travel extensively, visit friends and family, and reconnect with those he loved. In time, Dr. Survant returned to the collection he had started years ago.

The Land We Dreamed: Poems was released in April of 2014. The collection of poems is the final installment in a trilogy that Dr. Survant began in 1996. The trilogy is what he describes as “a type of epic of Kentucky; not individually, but together.” Dr. Survant continues, “It has a strong investment of emotion in it, I think. One theme that is not stated is loss. The main characters experience big loss; that provided an emotional quality.”

His latest work involved more research than his earlier collections. Dr. Survant believes it is important to allow all of this information to “settle down and become background” in order to make a poem more natural and avoid an “information dump.” The passage of time and his personal experiences enabled him to create a deeper collection of poems than he had envisioned.

Dr. Survant writes in what he refers to as the “high, plain style.” His poems are relatively short, rarely longer than a few pages, and are made up of short lines; however, this style belies the incredible depth behind his work. Dr. Survant says, “When I write a poem, I want the demands of language and my imagination to take precedent over anything else. I don’t want the ‘professor side’ to come in and say, ‘Well, you’ve left out this and you’ve left out that.’ I want to go where my imagination takes me.”

Another theme in Dr. Survant’s poetry is his deep-rooted interest in the outdoors, which developed while “growing up in Central Kentucky in Owensboro, in the flatlands, on the flood plains of the Ohio and the Green River.” He retired early, in part, so he can enjoy the outdoors while he is still able.

Dr. Survant spends much of his leisure time traveling, enjoying nature, and visiting his two grandsons. Over the years, he’s managed to maintain an active lifestyle and encourages young people to “start exercising now and find a hobby that you don’t want to give up.”

Dr. Survant plans to publish a book of lyrical poems that have been published individually but never collected in a single volume. It is a slightly new direction than his trilogy. He says, “The kinds of poetry that I have written in these three books are narrative, lyrical, historical—all kinds of poetry. It was a little bit more like writing a novel.”

To learn more about *The Land We Dreamed: Poems* and the other works by Dr. Survant, please visit www.joesurvant.com. ☿

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“The Spirit Makes The Master”