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Katie Deedrick, Former Director, Student Support Services, Wright State University

Katie Deedrick
Wright State University - Main Campus

Kathy Morris
Wright State University - Main Campus

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Interview Information

Interview date: January 15, 2021

Interviewer: Kathy Morris (KM), Associate VP for Student Affairs, Retired

Interviewee: Katie Deedrick (KD), Director, Student Support Services (Retired)

https://youtu.be/xXv3JlbVbok

Interview Transcript

NOTE: At many points throughout the interview, Katie is inaudible, particularly at the beginning of nearly every one of her responses or when she and Kathy speak simultaneously.

[Beginning of interview – 00:04]

Kathy Morris: Okay. Hey!

Katie Deedrick: Good to see you!

KM: Welcome to everyone who will be checking this video out at some point in time. This is Kathy Morris, former Associate Vice President of Student Affairs, and I’m chair of the Historical Preservation Committee for Wright State’s Retirees Association. Today is Friday, January 15, 2021, and I’m interviewing Katie Deedrick, former Director of Student Support Services. Katie, I’m really happy to say that you’re my first interview in nearly a year due to the impact of COVID on our community and all across the globe. We have forty-five minutes for our conversation, so let me provide the caveat that Chris [Wydman] had me add to this. Do we have your permission to preserve this recording at Special Collections and Archives and make it available for public use without restrictions, including posting it on the project website?

KD: Yes.

KM: Thank you. Okay, so, to begin with, I like to start by asking my interviewees a little bit about your background. And seriously, when I say, “What about your background,” I’m really interested in where you came from, where you were educated, a little bit about your family, and how you ended up landing at Wright State University.
**KD:** Okay. Well, I'm Katie Deedrick, and I grew up primarily in Zanesville, Ohio, but I was born in Mount Vernon, and [that is] where grandparents were, and I'm the oldest of five. I went to Zanesville High School, graduated in 1973, and I was looking at colleges, and I chose Miami University. Of course, that's in Oxford. And people say, “Of Ohio?” And I say, “Miami was a university before Florida was a state.” But I went to Miami because it was far enough away from home that I felt like I was away from home, but close enough that I could get home, although I didn't come home all that much. I could get home if I needed to. So then, I graduated a semester early. That first year, Miami went back and switched from quarter systems to semesters. I graduated in December of 1976, and on January 2, I started at Wright State in graduate school in the mental health program in the College of Education. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do at that point in time. I thought I might want to be a clinical psychologist, but I thought, I'm going to get my master's at Wright State. Wright State was a young university, I had heard some good things about it, and I was able to get in, and I started and got my master's at Wright State, and sort of, the rest is I never really left.

**KM:** Katie, what do you remember about the campus when you were a student here? What was, like, the most vivid memory you have?

**KD:** Well, the first semester was — I'm sorry, let me say, I got so used to saying “semesters.” The first quarter, winter quarter 1977—

**KM:** Right.

**KD:** —was when, if I remember correctly, I think—

**KM:** The blizzard.

**KD:** Well, the blizzard was in '78, I think, but it was so cold that Governor Rhodes — I think it was Governor Rhodes at that point — closed state installations, universities being one of them. And the snow was piled up so high in what's now the lawn, I guess, of Hamilton Hall, which was actually a parking lot in front of Rike Hall.

**KM:** Yes.

**KD:** I remember that. I remember the candy shop that I would frequent up in the University Center, now the Student Union. And I just liked it. It was a place where there were a lot of different people. I liked the master's program, and I was lucky enough to get an assistantship with Dr. Glenn Graham in statistics. He picked me up after Dr. Hutchinson moved to Florida, and I worked with him mostly, but a little bit with Dr. Jim Dillehay, who was the Associate Dean in Education and, believe it or not, [the] grad assistant in statistics.

**KM:** You know, Katie, I should have known that you worked with Glenn Graham, and I don't know why that kind of was slipping my mind, but, boy, talk about a person with huge history, and to have worked with him — terrific guy.
KD: Fantastic, fantastic. He was fantastic.

KM: So, your program. Was it two years? Did you have six quarters?

KD: I did a summer. Well, I started in the [winter quarter] of 1977, and I graduated in August of ’79. I did a master’s thesis, and I did some summer – I slowed down because I had a grad assistantship, but then I was able to get a full-time job for a year in Teacher Corps, which is a federally funded project, in the College of Education. Then, I went to Student Support Services, which was a [federal grant program], working with Dr. Anne Shearer in the special services program for academically underprepared students. So, we had quite a comprehensive program of peer mentors, peer facilitators, coursework for students who were academically underprepared to assist them – it’s part of the TRIO Program – to assist them in being prepared. I also worked with Steve Simon, who was in at that point – now the Office of Disability Services.

KM: In Disability Services. So, you know, I think most people think of you as being, if not one of the longest-serving, the longest-serving staff member in Student Affairs. I think Connie Nunamaker might be the only other person that comes to mind, but you probably have more history in Student Affairs than anybody that I could recall. What was the relationship between those Student Service components that were technically not in Student Affairs and the Student Affairs units like back then? How much regular collaboration did you have?

KD: Well, we had quite a bit. We were in – right now, where the Veteran and Military Center is, there was a Student Services wing, which was actually the hallway between Millett and Allyn Hall. At first, when I started in Special Services, actually, that grant was a collaboration, because Steve Simon was in Student Affairs with Dr. Elenore Koch. I began that in June of ’80, and then in ’82 to ’83, I went temporarily as Assistant Director of Handicapped Student Services, because there was another grant. We did some shuffling around, and Dr. Shearer said, “Well, see how it works. See how the grant funding works.” We weren’t sure. And she was very gracious and said, you know, “You can come back to the position.” Although, I had been working with a lot of students with disabilities and students who were in the program, and in fact, my office then changed to Handicapped Student Services, which was that whole – I believe there might be a classroom at the end there in the hallway, or it could be – I can’t remember. It could still be Veteran Affairs. That was Handicapped Student Services at one point. Prior, it had been, actually, Counseling Services, and I did two of my practicum experiences there. So, we collaborated. Then, I went back in ’83 because of funding to Student Support Services until ’88, when I went as Assistant Director under Joanne Risacher, and Dr. Koch had retired at that point, and I was Assistant Director for Student Development, and I did orientation and fraternities, Advisor to Fraternities, and, I believe, the alcohol and other drug education programs.

KM: You know, I remember those early times – when you were mentioning the ’83 to ’88. I was over in the University Center with Student Activities, and then University Center program-related kinds of things and administrative things, and our paths crossed quite a bit. We were doing quite
a lot of things. But your plate just kept growing and growing, and I think about all the units. Because it became more than, you know, fraternities and alcohol and other drug programs and orientation, then it was—

KD: [Orientation] Center, then I think it was Student Activities and Orientation, then it was Student Life, I think. But there’s somewhere along there, Campus Activities and Orientation, somewhere between ’89 – I think it was Director of Orientation and Tours – and somewhere along there, it was Campus Activities and Orientation. Then, when Dr. Abrahamowicz came—

KM: Now you’re skipping into almost the late ’90s. That would be ’96, ’97.

KD: Right.

KM: You remember all the things that were in your- under your umbrella at that time? It was clubs and organizations, too.

KD: Team leadership, commuter students. We picked up a grant – we were able to get a grant for – I’m thinking here – it was for alcohol and other drug education, and then we had Amy [Soots?], who was our health educator, so we expanded to health education, and we worked with Counseling and Wellness, and we then expanded into the sexual assault area and the different advocate areas – the survivor advocate area, the power-based violence. At that point, it wasn’t called that, but we expanded into that area, too. We also did Student Media, Parents’ Association, [and] Parents’ Weekend.

KM: Yeah, I remember at the time, and correct me if I’m wrong because it gets really fuzzy when you think about all these things that were becoming part and parcel of the student experience, you know? Like, in our early years, I don’t want to say things were cut and dry, but there were very clear departments and units, and they kind of did their thing, and yes, they collaborated, but you pretty much did your thing. Then, we get to the place where the expectations of students – not just students, but their parents – and the campus community for managing, providing oversight, providing support for students, became much more front and center, and there came a time, under Dr. A. [Abrahamowicz], where he, as I recall, said, “We need a person who’s dealing with student concerns.” I don’t know how we termed it, but “Student Support Services” became the title. But the feeling was that you were the person, the best person, the only person who in our division really had a grasp of managing and providing, I guess, what I’d call case management for our students with concerns. And as I recall, then, you became Director of Student Support Services, which became a standalone department within the Division of Student Affairs.

KD: Yeah, that was in May, I believe – well, July 1. I mean, it was transitioning May and June in 2004, and then July 1 effectively.

KM: And that would have been then when Rick Danals became Director of Student Activities, and we kind of reorged those activity and student organization things, correct?
KD: -moved to University Hall for two years, and then it was reorged and I’m trying to think – Gary [Dickstein] did some Greeks or something, and I think they split off the Greeks for a while there, and then Rick came in.

KM: Right, I think at one point, Gary had Student Conduct and Greeks, which was kind of a weird combination.

KD: [audio gap]- he had had – I’m sorry, getting caught up- he had had Greeks when he was—

KM: In Res Life.

KD: In Res Life and Housing.

KM: Yeah. You know, what makes this so complicated is that so many of us – at a period of time, when we sat around the director’s table, if we started adding up everybody’s years at the university, it went well past a hundred, because many directors had more than two decades of experience doing various things and kind of moving through the organization. Let’s talk a little bit about the role of the Office of Student Support Services. What do you recall being kind of – not necessarily a lightning rod, but become the push for focusing on those particular needs of college students? Not just, I guess, what we would call “bad behavior,” but care and concern behaviors.

KD: Right, care and concern. It was a whole… I think it was, well, a lot has happened, from my perspective, in the college experience. Now, not that students before, you know, the last five to ten years – because that was 2004, so, what, that was almost seven years ago? But- It’ll be coming up on seven years when Student Support Services was founded- but I think that we became- it was an evolution in colleges and universities, particularly Wright State, because I think they’ve always been out ahead of the needs of students and the particular… that’s what attracted me, our diverse population, our mix of ages, life experiences. So, I think colleges and universities became aware that students, while the academic is very important, and the cocurricular, there are also some psychosocial needs. There are needs that students have mental health wise. You know, it is Maslow’s hierarchy. I was reading an article last night, forwarded to me from a colleague in Student Affairs at Wright State, who [was] looking particularly in the Residents’ Life staff and the Student Affairs staff about the pandemic and what’s happening now, and how Student Affairs has always been there on the ground level with students and meeting a lot of needs, and I think there are a lot of – Maslow’s hierarchy. I mean, we found that students had financial concerns. They had concerns about food insecurity. Some students had dependent care needs. So, it was all wrapped up in the package that students were experiencing a lot of different things, and sometimes those needs played out in ways where we felt that we could be more effective if we actually addressed the needs and talked with the students about them, so that it wasn’t always… so that it would be successful for them, and they would have a chance to get a college degree. To meet their goals, whatever that was, and usually it was a college degree, but sometimes it might not be. So, I don’t know that there
was one thing, but I think the tide was sort of turning, and experiences of life – and students were bringing extra experiences with them that maybe they already had, but education was changing, things were not as structured-

KM: You know, I was also thinking, too, about how fortunate we were as a division to have a number of areas put in Student Affairs that might typically not have been assigned to our division. Specifically, the police department and athletics.

KD: Yes.

KM: And you know, for so long, we had the dotted-line relationship with Counseling and Wellness, and Student Health, but ultimately Counseling and Wellness became part of the division. Can you talk a little bit about what we kind of, in our silly way, referred to as our “Students with Issues Group” - SWIG- but the real name of that group, the people who were involved, and how that served the work that you were doing, to support the work you were doing?

KD: Well, it's interesting. We were the Student Concern Committee, and it was really spread across a couple of different areas at first. And speaking of Counseling and Wellness Services, the interesting thing is they used to be part of Student Affairs long ago when Dr. Koch was there, and I think we were still a young university, but when we got the School of Professional Psychology, I think, because of the expertise that they had, then there was a transition, although there was, I think, some financial support always from Student Affairs. So, that was interesting. Student Health has sort of always been – this is sort of an aside – well, they've either been with the School of Medicine or the School of Nursing. But we had a Student Concern Committee that first started out – actually, I think Dr. Gary Dickstein started it with Dave Finney when Dave was… I think he was Assistant-

KM: Associate. I think he was Associate Chief.

KD: They would meet to talk about – because Gary was heading the Student Conduct area, and so they would meet and talk about things. Well, then, I think, the late '90s started emergency response teams. And so, there were emergencies with students that might expand some areas, there might be natural emergencies because of weather, there might be other things, so we started getting this emergency response team, we started adding people, but it was the police, Residents’ Life – now Residents’ Life and Housing, it was the Vice President's office, you as the Associate Vice President were there. Let’s see, who else. Counseling and Wellness, Student Support Services-

KM: Disability Services got added eventually.

KD: Eventually, but not right away. But we were on call for commuter students, for residential students, if there was any kind of – if there was a sexual assault, a report of sexual misconduct, sexual assault, for response. So, we met and tried to work together to keep students – I think, to
mitigate any negative experiences to work and provide support for students that needed it in a number of different ways. Eventually, they brought in RaiderConnect and the Veterans [Center], and what was University College, Student Success, but that was at the end. I think like 2017, '18. I retired in '19. August 1, 2019. But somewhere along there. So, we worked together, and in trying to respond – we met weekly, but then we met more if we needed to – in trying to respond to student concerns. If there was a student who seemed to be having trouble – there might be student conduct concerns, there might be student health concerns, there might be health concerns-

**KM:** Well, I have to mention this, and part of the reason why I wanted to interview you, Katie, was because I kind of had a front seat view of what your role specifically was in all of this, and I know you're crediting a lot off people for their involvement in addressing those student concerns because they needed to be involved. But there wasn’t anyone that was doing the work you were doing, and I daresay I think it would be very difficult to envision anybody on another campus being available as you were all those years, at the drop of a dime. When there was an emergency call, you were always at the hospital. And obviously, when we had students from our residential community involved, there were staff that responded as well. But you at one time, I think, had – this is before we had the smart phones that we had – I think you had two beepers and a cell phone, or maybe two cell phones and two beepers.

**KD:** Well, I had my own cell phone, but then there was – we used to have, when we were in Student Life, you know, we had responses – emergencies for commuter students. And that could be anywhere, from a student going to the hospital, a student getting injured, you know, emergencies at home, things like that. So, and then we used to use the pagers with orientation before we had the cell phones. That was in the summer, when we did the overnight program, which was really a fun type – that really was—

**KM:** I think you lived up here, Katie. Maybe more than most people.

**KD:** I did.

**KM:** Well, do you at any point in time ever get an idea of how many cases you were personally involved in? Did you ever do a count of that?

**KD:** I did count – I mean, I would have two- or three-hundred contacts with students a semester, usually, or more. Sometimes – that was all the way from individual to writing letters – professors were wonderful. If a student was in the hospital, if they had a family emergency, if they had a personal emergency, in working with professors to help students be successful, they were very responsive, and professors were working with Counseling and Wellness, too. So, there were a lot of students. But it was a fun time. And when I say “fun” – did I think I was going to stay at Wright State when I came? No, but I was just sort of taking things as it happened, and I was always challenged, and I always got to do different things, although the undercurrent was always student involvement in terms of student contact and support, which is what I really loved to do.
KM: Well, Katie, to your credit, the work that you did was recognized by Greene County in 2013 for outstanding community service. Obviously, your relationship with all those agencies that provided support for various issues and concerns involving our students' mental health, physical health, sexual health – all of those things were part and parcel of your outreach into the community. And on top of that, you were recognized many times at the university for outstanding service, with both presidents’ awards as well as awards from different departments, for the kind of dedication that you provided. What is your best memory? Like, when you think over that – was it forty-one? Did you have forty-one years, or was it—?

KD: I had forty-one years of actual service. I was actually at the university, probably – let’s see – forty-two and a half, as a grad student.

KM: Okay, well, that is more than significant. So, when you consider the scope of that time and the impact that you had, what is your best memory of being part of this campus community?

KD: It would be hard to pick out just one. I think in terms of the student involvement, students would leave notes, would call, students would send a thank-you card, I would see them later on, I had several international students who wrote a note when they graduated. And you just don’t think about – I mean, I just did it because – they’re why we’re here, and why the university’s here, and it was serious business, but it was really an honor to be able and humbling to be able to help them. And then there were many fun moments with colleagues, and you know, you would have to travel – I mean, I used to go with colleagues to – I’ve driven students to New York, the Association of Student Media. In Lambda Union, we went to – it was Lambda. Now it’s Rainbow Alliance.

KM: Rainbow Alliance.

KD: We had to go to the restroom, driving up, and Dr. A.: “Why are you leaving at five o’clock at night?” Well, people have tests. So, I would always be leaving in February, driving up to Wisconsin to a conference, or driving every February up to Bowling Green with Gerry Petrak, who was—

KM: Right!

KD: One year, the whole van broke down before we even got out. And she was already up there. She said, “I don’t think she’s gonna be happy, so [unintelligible] when she comes up here.” But it’s just the fun things with students, and the chance with students to – I’ll never forget, with Advisor to Fraternities, at the point in time it was very early, and we went up to Bowling Green, and they had suite-type living, and we had a student who used a wheelchair. And I said, “I just want to see that everything, you know, you can get out, you can see – I want to see where everybody’s staying.” So, I had driven a carload of Greeks up, and I went into the— I started to go in, and the fraternity men from BG said, “You can’t go in there.” And our fraternity
men said, “She’s our advisor. She can go wherever she wants.” So, I knew. That was – \[laptop falls off her lap, video signal lost\] oops!

**KM:** It was like being den mom, right?

**KD:** It was. Now, let me get you back \[trying to re-connect video\]. Let me get you back.

**KM:** Okay. I’m still here. I can still hear you.

**KD:** Can you see me?

**KM:** Uh—

**KD:** Oh, yeah. Well, I’ll get you. Here, I gotcha. Here we go.

**KM:** I can still hear you.

**KD:** Well, I have, like – Aunt Kate here has screwed up her… well, we’re recording, so that’s good.

**KM:** We’re recording, so it’s fine. Let’s just keep going. We still have about fourteen minutes left. So, those memories of being kind of the den mom, or being, you know, a surrogate parent, or just being a friend to the students. Those are things that stay with you, and I’m sure you’re still in touch with students since retiring, because I know I am. There are so many of them that, you know, you get to know them, you know all about their lives as they’re students, and then after they leave you stay in touch with them. We now have students we know who’ve married and have children, they’re in wonderful careers, and it’s very nice to be able to say that you have that relationship.

**KD:** Yes. I found one student this summer, who – I was volunteering for the Biden campaign, and I thought, “This student’s name looks familiar.” And she was an organizer!

**KM:** Isn’t that great?

**KD:** It is fantastic to see somebody in a different–

**KM:** Well, let me ask – just because I’ve asked this question of the other people I’ve interviewed, too. It’s always great to reflect on the most wonderful memories of the times spent here. What would you say is one of your biggest disappointments at Wright State?

**KD:** Well, I can’t really say that I have had too many disappointments. You know, I guess if I had a disappointment, it would be that we were not able to get enough funding sometimes for students to be able to continue, and many students struggled so much – that we were not able to get more funding to have an infrastructure for more possible services.
KM: Yeah.

KD: But I would have to say we did what we could within our role, and we had community partners that helped as well, so, you know, I would see that we made referrals – so that would be about, I think, the biggest disappointment.

KM: You know, I think you're... I would echo your comments. I always thought that our university operated in a pretty lean fashion. We didn't have all the bells and whistles that other universities had, but as a division I always felt that we were a good team, and we had gotten to know each other well enough that we probably could describe strengths and weaknesses of each of our directors and all the staff around the table, because we had known each other for so long. And that became a kind of strength for us in those years, even when things were not readily available to us financially, or we didn't have the facilities that we felt we needed, or other kinds of accommodations that we knew were happening on other campuses. If you were to describe Wright State in your earliest days, what's a word that you would use to describe it then?

KD: Energetic.

KM: And what about your perception of Wright State now? In one word, what would that be?

KD: Transition.

KM: Yeah. Transition.

KD: [Gap in audio] Transition. At the beginning, there was energy – not that there's not now – but there was energy, it was new, we weren't bound by constraints of tradition that we had to do it this way.

KM: Yes.

KD: So, there were a lot people pitching in, “let's figure this out.” It was just-

KM: Yeah, we were able to kind of break some ground and do some things that we never really expected we would have a chance to do, because we did come at a time when it was still very young.

KD: And so, we had a chance to really, I think, break ground on a lot of things.

KM: Well, from your responsibilities – overseeing, supervising, responding to students and their needs – what would you recommend to a new student coming to Wright State?
KD: Well, I would recommend that they might take advantage of the services as early as they can, and I know sometimes to ask for help is not easy, but to sort of get to know their professors, get to know some of the offices. Be involved in campus activities, because I think that really helps make it their home. I know that this has been – well, I don’t know that there will ever be another year – maybe it’s going to stretch a little longer, a year or two that’s going to be like this, but we’ll get through this.

KM: Mm hmm.

KD: We’ll get through this, and this will provide perspective as we get through it, and I know it’s hard not to be involved, but don’t give up now. There will be creative ways to be involved.

KM: I think one of the things that your colleagues decided to do because of the work that you had so nobly done for all these years by creating the Katie Deedrick Student Support Fund. Can you talk a little bit about that and what it does?

KD: I am really very honored, and it was really very humbling, but I hope that it is able, and I know that it’s able to help students who might be experiencing financial difficulty and difficulty in their life that they might not be able to… financial aid is fine, but it only goes so far, and it’s been cut at the federal level, so students have emergencies, and they barely have enough for school and housing needs. Not even that. And so, hopefully this will – I was really so honored and humbled that – and hope that it will help students to be able to stay in school, because that is one of the prime reasons that students drop out, is financial reasons. Personal and financial reasons, and they just cannot get the financial support they need to be able to continue.

KM: Yeah, agreed. Well, is there anything that I didn’t ask you that you’d like to share about your experiences and perspectives at Wright State University?

KD: Well, I just… it’s been… I’ve had a little bit more time than normal to look, I think, than usual with this pandemic, because apparently, I’m old. So now—

KM: That’s a relative term, Katie.

KD: But I am just very grateful to have had the experiences that I have, and I think that there are many good people there, Destiny and her team are doing a great job. And it was time. It was time. And in retrospect, looking at the pandemic, I think— [laughing]

KM: Your timing was great, girl.

KD: And so, I’m just grateful to have been a part of it, and still stay in touch with people, and it’s neat.

KM: Well, I don’t think there’s anybody who was at the university during that period of time that you were there who wouldn’t have recognized the name Katie Deedrick, because you were
making a difference every day – you know, as Bob Rando used to say, changing lives. You know, you did. You changed a lot of lives. You made a difference for a lot of students. And I’m really happy that this was an opportunity to include some of your memories in Wright State’s archives. It’s so important, I think, for us to be able to document the memories and thoughts of our faculty and staff who were here in the earliest years. And to say that you have spent forty years at an institution that still is a relatively young institution is pretty remarkable.

**KD:** Well, I’m just grateful for the experience, and thanks for doing this project.

**KM:** Well, I’m happy to do it, and I hope that we’ll find you in our ranks of Wright State Retirees sometime in the not-too-distant future. We’re kind of grappling with the world of COVID and how it’s affected the organization’s availability to stay in touch, but we’re still communicating with each other every month. Hopefully things will get better in the coming months, and we’ll be able to return to some of the things we enjoy doing to stay in touch with friends and colleagues who were part of our experience as well. So, I thank you so very much for making the time today, and I think that Chris will tell me to tell you that there probably will be something in the mail to you that’s just for your signature and return for the purposes of their documentation of this memory. And within – well, I can’t tell you timeline, again, because of things being wonky and weird like they are, but you will have an opportunity to actually view – to listen to our recording, because there’s a way to access that through the archives. So, when I find out when that is available to you, I’ll let you know, and you’ll be able to give it a listen, and if there’s anything you would care to comment on or say, “Wait a second, I don’t recall saying that,” you can contact Chris.

**KD:** Thank you.

**KM:** So, I hope you stay healthy in this environment, and I hope we’ll have a chance to talk again in the not-so-distant future. I do try to stay in communication with some of our other colleagues, and everybody’s kind of doing what we’re doing, just trying to stay healthy and safe and keep our bubbles small.

**KD:** Thank you so much.

**KM:** You’re so much appreciated, and thank you so very much for being my January 2021 interview. We’ll talk again soon, I hope.

**KD:** Take care. Thanks.

**KM:** Okay, Katie. You take care, too.

**KD:** Bye-bye.

**KM:** Bye-bye.
KD: Bye-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW – 44:00]