

Catherine Clarke Fraser

Katy Fraser was born near Hampton Court, England, just one month before the end of World War II. She says her parents used to tell her that when Hitler got one look at her he decided to call it quits. I ask you: given the circumstances, what other profession could Katy have chosen in later life than German studies?

Actually, she chose many before joining the ranks of academia. Indeed, her life looks like a highlight reel of adventures, but a guiding thread is her continued interest in Germany and the German language. In keeping with her earlier timing, Katy first went to Germany on a school exchange from England, arriving a day or two before the Berlin Wall went up in 1961. She still has vivid recollections of the reactions of her host family and her impressions of a visit to the border that separated the two German states at that time. Following another exchange the next summer in the same town, she decided to spend more time in Germany after finishing her English high school, where she did A-levels in German, French, and art. Her first “career” immediately followed: working in a Litz factory in Wetzlar, which, she says, was not exactly fun but was good for her acquisition of the German language.

Upon completion of a course in London for bilingual secretaries, Katy went to Geneva to work for the Lutheran World Federation at the World Council of Churches from 1965 to 1966. She left Geneva because of an American whom she met and married, or, as she puts it: she came to America because she married an American, but she stayed anyway. Her first job in Connecticut was as a secretary to a wine importer who, as she recalls, was such a snob that he loved having someone answering the phone with an English accent and able to pronounce the names of German and French wines correctly. Soon, however, Katy and “hubby #1” were off to Scotland for a year. Finally, after returning to the United States and working in law offices and at the University of Hartford, she decided to enroll full time at the University of Connecticut, where she also acted as an advisor to other women going back to school. Upon completion of her dissertation she worked for the Critical Languages Program, a clearinghouse for people who wished to learn the less commonly taught languages. This desire also consumed Katy, who promptly added knowledge of Swedish to her accomplishments. In Sweden—yet another adventure—Katy lived at the Strindberg Museum until returning to the United States to begin her career in German studies at Brown University. Reflecting her interests in Sweden, Katy’s publications include a book on Strindberg and art and a one-act play that was given a staged reading on January 22, 2001, at a reception honoring the anniversary of Strindberg’s birth.

At Brown Katy served as the language coordinator in the German department for 10 years. Under the auspices of the Brown/Rostock Exchange Program, Katy also served as visiting professor at the Wilhelm-Pieck-Universität in Rostock, German Democratic Republic. In the summer of 1984, in other words, Katy experienced the other side of the border she first glimpsed in the summer of 1961. Fall 1993 marked not the end of her adventures, but the beginning of their Bloomington phase.

Katy was hired as the first true language coordinator in the Department of Germanic Studies at Indiana University. As such she also served as our first classroom-based second-language acquisition researcher and as our first full-time teacher and mentor of graduate students seeking entry into the profession. She has defined the language coordinator position for us during what has been 11 full years at IU, and we are extremely grateful. We have placed nearly 100 percent of our graduating Ph.D.s in university and college teaching positions and have found work in secondary education for our M.A.T.s. We have been told by search committees at other institutions that our students are the best-trained and most professionalized students currently on the market, and no small measure of that is due to Katy’s work, starting—but not ending—with the orientation of new associate instructors and the teaching of the two graduate pedagogy courses she created.

Perhaps the most telling testimony to her contribution comes from students and former students who unfailingly express gratitude for her efforts over the years. She has been praised for the quality of her training and the way she has mentored students throughout their graduate school careers. Most of all, comments from students laud her patience, the time and care she takes to solve the most intractable problems, and the general intellectual, emotional, and material support she has provided. “Katy is always on our side,” I’ve heard students say; she “always covered my back” in difficult situations, always gave me the “feeling of being supported” which “gave me great peace of mind.”

Katy is still an active member of the profession on the national level. Among other appointments, she is or has been a member of the Modern Language Association (MLA) Advisory Committee on Foreign Languages and Literatures, the MLA unionization committee, the MLA Delegate Assembly, the membership committee of the American Association of Teachers of German, and various committees of the Educational Testing Service. On campus she has most recently been a member of the College of Arts and Sciences’ policy and tenure and promotion committees, the Global Village Implementation Committee, the

committee to plan an international studies major, the university committee on undergraduate education, the Overseas Study Advisory Council, and a host of others. She has published extensively on a variety of pedagogical issues dealing with second-language acquisition and has delivered scores of papers on the topic. She has also co-edited a widely used first-year German language textbook. Nor is she done! Katy has been contracted to write a book on a Web-based course she developed in recent years and has also been invited to write another language textbook that will include videos and a specially written story by the German novelist Martin Grzimek (whose work, by the way, has been translated by our own award-winning Breon Mitchell).

Katy retires at the end of this academic year a bit ahead of schedule because a series of illnesses has left her less able to continue the work-intensive and stress-filled role of language coordinator in our department. Though she will always have fond memories of Bloomington, Katy plans on moving to a house she owns in Rhode Island, where she will be closer to her husband, Dierk Hoffmann (professor of German, Colgate University). And we, too, will always have fond memories of Katy, her wit and good humor, and, of course, her stories about her kitty cats.

William Rasch