



GEROME PINXIT.

Contemplating Tompkins

Contemplating Tompkins

What a great journey the class took with Ken!

Thoughts written on the occasion of KT's
leaving full-time teaching,
Spring 2010

I didn't have Ken until relatively late in my Stockton career. I had him for Shakespeare. I knew who he was, of course, but assumed I would be a new name and face for him. I arrived a bit early one morning early in the semester, and Ken walked over and sat in the empty seat next to me and demanded to know why I hated beets so much. I was a bit flustered, and wondered how he could possibly have known this trivia concerning my palate for root vegetables. He was not forthcoming with his source of info, but despite this mystery we had an interesting conversation about beets, the class, and the LITT program in general before class started.

It didn't take me long to realize that I had posted something on my Caxton blog (the server before Titania) about my distaste for the purple veggie, and that he'd probably poked around my web space periodically since it had won the blog award the year before. So the mystery was solved, and there was a nice reminder there that Ken really wanted to get to know me, not just as a student of Shakespeare, but as a person, beetroot hate and all. I've got lots of interesting memories of KT since then, but that first discussion is always one of the moments that comes up when I reminisce with my Stockton friends about the charm of Ken Tompkins, and of the LITT program.

Pour finir je dirai une dernier chose, un petit mot en francais, pour rendre fou l'anglais au fond de M. Tompkins: T'es le meilleur!

Ashley Ayrer

You taught me to read fairy tales with an analytical eye. That was the beginning of my international journey through literature, history, and culture: I've found my muse.

My prose is still arrogant and unwieldy, but your genuine efforts to instill substance and brevity have given this narrator a fighting chance.

Thank you.

Melissa Bailey
Class of 2004

Ken, I will always remember your story of the student who
lived in the ceiling! It will forever haunt me!!
Sincerely,

Mindy Bancheri

The bearded, dignified godfather of Literature is departing, but
not for an eternity
we will see him again
walking our hallways as if he were floating high on the melo-
dies of Shakespearean lyres,
With each step, he is riding high on intellect; and, we take
comfort in his quiet wisdom.
As he approaches, crowds stand dumbfounding – wondering
where this great man goeth.
Briefly, he blesses us with his essence; and, for a moment
we too are seeing through his lenses.
We are taken to Verona, Athens, and Rome – staring in the
faces of Romeo and Juliet,
Theseus, and Julius Caesar.
Then, again, we see the hallways of Stockton.
A place he loves and is loved.
Stockton his heart.

Shawna Beals
Class of 2005

Years after I graduated Stockton, I came down to attend the end-of-year Literature celebration (alumni had been invited to attend). I had recently graduated with my Ph.D., and when Tompkins learned of this, he was so congratulatory and then said to me, “Welcome to the club. Now let’s do the secret handshake!” This was such a humorous –and refreshing – reaction. It was somewhat self-deprecating, and I really appreciated it because at times – let’s admit it, guys – the academic community can be somewhat stuffy and (dare I say it) high brow. Often – perhaps because I went the way of corporate America with my degrees, and I tend to be very down to earth and may not fit the traditional “image” of an English Ph.D. – I have experienced such high-brow individuals react in somewhat of a surprised fashion when they find out that, yes, I too, have earned that elusive degree. When this happens, I always remember Ken Tompkins’ reaction, and it makes me smile!

Christy (Coleman) Bouziotis

In my senior year, I had Dr. Tompkins for my senior seminar. We were immersed in Northrop Frye and were assigned a 30-page thesis paper. Since Frye is not the easiest writer to decipher, and I was faced with the daunting task of applying his work to a text, it was only natural that a certain amount of anxiety started to set in.

I sweated bullets when I had to hand my rough draft in. While Dr. Tompkins was accommodating and concise as a professor, he still had an intimidating presence about him. When I received my rough draft, it had only a few minor grammatical errors marked and the words “this is good, do it” at the bottom. The feeling of pride that went through me was immense. I considered this the greatest compliment one could receive from Dr. Tompkins.

While that might sound strange, it was the quality I admired

most in him. Dr. Tompkins never lauded you with praise. He graded tough and had high expectations. However, upon entering graduate school and receiving my first syllabus, I felt no intimidation because of the numerous classes I took with Dr. Tompkins. His demanding coursework prepared me well and allows me to carry myself in academia with an air of confidence.

Thanks Dr. Tompkins.

Bruce Bowles Jr.
Class of 2005

I knew the day would come when Ken Tompkins would leave Stockton. Many future students will not know what they will miss – an awesome, kind, and extremely caring “teacher.” His physical being and his voice could be intimidating until you got to know him and realize he is really a gentle man. It became obvious to me that he expected your best work at all times because he wants his students to get all they can from what they are studying. While I didn’t have him for a literature course – I had *Electronic Publishing* with him – he made such an impression on me. I truly think of him often and use what he taught me almost daily at work. In addition, while Stockton truly works with students to bring their visions of their futures to reality, he managed to do that while maintaining that classic “professorial” dignity. I will always remember him with fondness and respect.

Here is one anecdote about Professor Tompkins.

Everyone in the Literature program knew that when Professor Tompkins taught *Macbeth*, he wore his kilt to school. One morning we were all in the computer lab waiting for him – very unusual as his rule was everyone should be on time. I will never forget him telling the class that class started at 8:00 am. We were to be in the lab by then or we shouldn’t bother. I, being a nontraditional student who had already been up for 2 1/2 hours, thought that was great! (I loved the class and was anxious to get

into my work.) So when he wasn't there, I was concerned. No one came from the office to say that he had called and said he was delayed because the class started before the offices opened.

I knew that it was Macbeth-time. As it was a snowy day, I thought that he might have had some car trouble – accident, flat tire, something – and he was standing on the side of the road waiting for assistance in a kilt. I imagined drivers driving by him and looking at him in wonderment. I envisioned a tractor trailer driver pulling over to give him a ride just to hear the explanation of what he was doing on the side of the road in a snow storm in a kilt.

As it turned out, his wife had had an accident and he had taken her to the hospital, but not in his kilt.

As you know he can always paint a picture with words and he certainly created one in my mind that day.

Jackie Bradley
Class of 1992

When people ask me what I want to be when I grow up, I usually start off by saying, “well, I had this professor while I was at Stockton...”

Professor Ken Tompkins: important figure in my life.

I feel honored to have had Ken Tompkins as a professor; his passion and enthusiasm can only be matched by knowledge and wisdom. Aside from these though, classrooms and subjects aside too, what I value most is the character that is Ken Tompkins: he is to me and to many others – students and non-students alike – a hero and a role-model, and most definitely a living legend.

Professor Tompkins inspires me not only to learn and to understand folklores, but to live and to be folklore.

Mike Bruno

Now a teacher myself, I often think about the mentors who influenced my love for the grace and poetry of our literary heritage. Professor Tompkins, you brought Chaucer and Shakespeare alive and made them relevant to me. When teaching *The Canterbury Tales* to my students, I often ponder your technique of relating the expertise you owned to your students. For you, Professor Tompkins, it was not just a profession; it was a calling to keep the literature alive for all who crossed your path. I have fond memories of you bringing the characters into the classroom as you taught the “Reeves Tale” or came in full array of a kilt with a dirk in your sock while teaching *Macbeth*. Thank you for taking the time to help this lowly Lit/Lang Major to see into the mesmerizing depths of the literature presented in your classes.

Fond memories,
Thank you,

Naomi Buechner
Class of 1993

It was nearing graduation. Ken was my preceptor and had sent word through a few professors that I had to take care of some business with Peter Hagen. I honestly don’t recall what it was exactly, but graduation wouldn’t happen without it.

A few friends accompanied me since they had graduation business to attend to as well. They went first. I became a bumbling mess – I suppose I was nervous, and blurted out, “Ken Tompkins sent me here and I know whatever he says is right. Could you check...”

Dryly, Hagen replied, “Oh you’re the one who thinks Tompkins is right. He’s finally convinced someone.”

We burst into laughter. The stress curtain was raised.

We laughed because Ken would have had a superb retort – one that made you wish you had thought of it first, and because Ken would have accompanied the comment with an enormous

Cheshire cat grin. This is Ken Tompkins that I know. He is sublimely playful, a passionate literature teacher, and just as passionate about his wife, Nancy Tompkins; I relished that he used her first name and last name together, as if announcing her arrival into the room.

Late spring brings Shakespearian sonnets into my eighth grade classroom. Excitement builds as students uncover the language and become enamored with poetry, as I did, when studying literature and poetry in Ken Tompkins' classroom. In teaching, knowing the content is half the battle. Ken taught me more than content knowledge. He provided an intangible gift; something I try to pass on to my students. It's the humor that comes with sticky situations that we uncover in close reading, or tears that trickle down a cheek when we see ourselves; or those we love, or loved, in poetry. It's the connections that we make as human beings – something that forces you to dive deep and surface toward sunnier shores.

Thanks, Ken.

Concetta Burzo
Class of 2003

***D**o what you love, love what you do.*

That is the secret of success.

I could tell by sitting in your literature class that “you love what you do.”

As my adviser you suggested that I pursue teaching English as a Second Language. After a failed attempt to teach English at the high school level to students who were neither inspired or motivated to learn literature, I was offered a position to teach ESL for the Continuing Education Program at ACCC. Since 2006, I have been teaching adults who are eager and extremely appreciative to learn the English Language. I have found this to be both

challenging and rewarding.

I think of you often and wish to thank you for your great advice. I will never forget my time at Stockton. I loved your class. You made Shakespeare relevant and meaningful.

I will, however, never forget how you stormed out one day, when a freshmen rudely fell asleep in your early morning class. I was not the typical student, as I returned to finish my career in my late 40s. I understood the frustration of dealing with teens, as I had some of my own at home.

Thank you so much for your dedication as a professor and mentor.

I will never forget you.

Good Luck and I hope you have a happy retirement.

Ann Camano

Class of 2005

I am a 1991 Literature & Language graduate and had the distinct pleasure of having Dr. Tompkins as my preceptor and mentor throughout my years at Stockton College. From the moment I met him, I knew he was someone who could spark creativity and unlock potential. I was, after all, a non-traditional student, a “thirty something” wife and mother who decided to return to college to pursue a Literature degree and teaching certification.

Dr. Tompkins had a profound influence on me due to his stellar teaching skills, his larger-than-life presence and booming voice, his brilliant sense of humor, and most importantly, his passion for English, Medieval, and Shakespearean literature. When it came time to choose my senior project and mentor, I immediately, and without hesitation, chose Dr. Tompkins to guide me through my research project on “Women in Shakespearean Literature.” I chose Dr. Tompkins because I was certain he would help me realize my potential and would encourage me to think creatively and critically. I could have chosen another mentor who

was not as demanding; however, I felt I would have sold myself short had I not taken the opportunity to work directly with him on my senior project. I am extremely grateful to have learned from one of the top experts in his field, and I wish him well as he goes forward in his new and evolving role at Stockton.

Sincerely,

Lynn Catalfamo
Class of 1991

I came to Stockton in 1975 after a few years in the army, a few years of work, and a degree from county college. I knew from this experience that college should not just be a trade school for future employment. I wanted to learn more about life and become a better person. So I chose to major in English Literature and was lucky enough to have Ken Tompkins as my advisor.

Ken told me straightaway that an English degree might be a ticket to the unemployment line. But he also exuded a love of literature that was infectious. He even talked me into taking a course on Romance literature. Try studying 20,000 lines of medieval French poetry in a class with 6 students. But Ken taught us that one can study an artifact of culture for the pure joy of it, independent of its relevance to the modern world.

I graduated from Stockton in 1977 and joined the Masters program in Literature at Rutgers University. Again, not a career decision, but a good one. In my two years as a teaching assistant, I tried to combine Ken's love of literature with a practical view of applying writing skills to the workplace. I even spent a summer at Oxford studying the Literature of Empire (Conrad, Forster, Achebe). My tutor there was a lot like Ken, except for the sherry before dinner and his obsession with Conrad. I graduated from Rutgers in 1981.

After more than 25 years in the Computer Science field (that's another story), I can say without hesitation that studying

Literature, especially with Ken Tompkins, helped me develop a set of skills that has been the foundation of my career. I am sorry to hear that Ken will no longer be teaching full time. But I am also happy to know that Ken will continue to mentor others who share in the delight of literature. Good luck, Ken. The *Romance of the Rose* will be forever with me.

Bob Choplin
Class of 1977

P. S. I am currently reading *Moby Dick* on my Kindle, among other things. I am sure you will appreciate the irony.

Memories of Ken Tompkins. I had Ken for several classes, having been a lit major. He's an unforgettable character. I have many memories of Ken's classes and personal conversations with him. The one thing that sticks in my mind the most, though, is what he said to us in the first class of the first day I attended Stockton. He said to the class: "If you're looking for knowledge, you're in the right place. If you're looking for wisdom, there's the door." I didn't really get the meaning of what he was saying until after I graduated and "real life" smacked me in the face. I learned a lot of useful knowledge at Stockton, in addition to what I taught myself, but I'm still trying to get a handle on wisdom. Ken was right. School is great when you want to gain knowledge, but only life can give you wisdom. Some people are unfortunate never to have had both. Because of the education I got at Stockton and especially from Ken, I have a great store of knowledge, even if I lack wisdom.

Thanks for the memories, Ken!

Mickey Christian DeCicco
Class of 1998, Literature Major

My educational experience with Professor Ken Tompkins started in Spring of 2008. I registered for my senior seminar; he was the instructor. The seminar was based on Monsters. We learned about monsters, and mythology, and read all different kinds of books over the semester. Our paper could be on any kind of monster: giants, vampires, mythological, whatever we so chose. I decided I was going to write my paper on giants. I had worked all through the semester. I did whatever had been asked of me by Ken, and did a good job at it. During the final month before the paper was due, I had an emotional break down after experiencing a tragic loss in my life. Unfortunately, this loss created a bad state of mind for me, and in turn I received a C- in the class, and did not pass. I was pissed. I was beyond pissed off. I thought, well, what the hell, a C-, he couldn't have just given me the C so that I could pass the course and not have to retake it? I held animosity towards Ken for that whole summer because I knew I would have to retake senior seminar and write another 30-page paper.

I had to take Professor Tompkins again, the following Fall 2008, for the required Shakespeare course. I was distraught that I would have to be in another of Ken's classes, but put my best foot forward to prove to him that I was capable of the work that was required of me. I did just that. Although I received a C+ in the course, I was happy in the end because I had passed the class. Over that next semester with Tompkins, I forgave him for what really had been my own fault. I came to realize that I deserved the C- in my seminar, and he had hadn't "given" me any grade, it was the grade that I earned.

I retook senior seminar Spring of 2009, and had the opportunity to take GT Lenard as my professor. It was my first and unfortunately only GT course, but I fell in love. She was a wonderful, caring, and fun professor, as was Ken. Ken had taught me a lifelong lesson; no matter what adversity is in your way you must complete your work the way it is expected of you. From this, I developed an appreciation for the experience I endured after not passing my first senior seminar class. No matter what comes your way, a college student must always do their best at

their work in order to succeed. I let my traumatic experience of Spring 2008 get in my way, and Ken made me realize over time that no matter what happens your work is important.

I give my sincere thanks to Professor Ken Tompkins now, and wish him the best over his retirement. He taught me a lesson that I will never forget. He is a wonderful professor, and has taught many students the same lesson that each has learned in their own way. Now that I have had the opportunity to have Professor Tom Kinsella, I can see why the two are such good friends. They are both dedicated professors, who do their best at making their student's experiences and lessons worthwhile and really, unforgettable.

Noelle DeFeo

*F*all 1992. Class was early. Too early for college-aged, Litt scholars. But we dared not be late. And I'm not sure whether he was always a tad late for effect or that we were always excessively early – fearing “the look.”

Here we all were: some desperately trying to reread the assignment, some barely breathing, some with tiny beads of sweat on their upper lips; in some one could notice scarcely controlled quivering, and many with eyes darting around the room as if looking for a place to hide – frightened deer we all were. The reality of all our fears heightened as we heard his footsteps approaching the room.

Did he say “Good morning” – I'm not quite certain for I was the one barely breathing.

After laying his books on the front table, he would proceed to walk around the room – circling his prey. Every so often he would stop abruptly in front of a victim whose eyes pleaded for mercy, and it was then that he would fire the questions.

All joking aside, I would have to say that what I learned in Ken's *Approaches to Literature* and *Shakespeare* courses was invaluable to me as a teacher. I get excited when I know I'm going

to teach the students how to deconstruct a short story. I get excited when I have the students find symbols by showing them to look “closely” at words. I just get excited teaching literature! Had he not given me the wealth of knowledge with which to teach my students, I would be teaching math instead.

Terry Doebley
Class of 1994

When I first registered for Literature classes at Richard Stockton College, I was hesitant and nervous. After all, I had recently moved to Smithville, was unfamiliar with the area, and a senior citizen returning to college after years of working in New York City, raising a family, and adjusting to a new retirement lifestyle. When I first walked into Professor Tompkins’ class, he made me feel welcome and comfortable amidst the majority of young students, and assured me that I could handle his course in Shakespeare. Although I had only read one or two plays in high school, more than fifty years ago, Professor Tompkins’ lectures opened the door to the genius of Shakespeare and made me a devotee of the genre for the rest of my life. After that first course, I signed up for every one of Professor Tompkins’ classes that I could fit into my schedule. When I finally graduated from Stockton in May 2005, I was elated and proud to have met the challenge. I attribute my success largely to Professor Tompkins for his encouragement and assistance through the years, especially his guidance during senior seminar.

May I add that I witnessed Professor Tompkins assist many of his students with their studies, and he always had time to answer questions, or give suggestions or advice about their curriculum. He is an exceptional teacher and remarkable human being. I feel very proud to have been in his classes.

Thank you for your many years of dedication and service to Stockton and its students. My very best wishes for many blessed

and joyful days of retirement!

Sincerely,

Virginia Dominic
Class of 2005

I t's hard to single out any one memory of Ken Tompkins. I think I'll have to go with the standby classic of my first impression of him, which was in *Literary Methodologies* my freshman year (waaaaay back in 2004). Being new to both Stockton and the LITT program, I knew nothing of Professor Tompkins, just that he taught the Shakespeare class I was dying to take. I'm pretty sure most of us in that tiny classroom in C Wing were scared – I mean, look at him. He's pretty epic. And that was before he mentioned he was a biker. As the semester went on, though, his tough-as-nails exterior gradually gave way to a welcoming spirit, a wickedly intelligent mind, and an equally wicked sense of humor. He was one of those professors I wanted to prove myself to, that I felt I needed to impress in some small way because he had definitely left an impression on me.

I don't think Stockton will be the same without such a historic figure, and the generations to come will surely be missing out. In fact, in my senior year at Stockton, while taking that Shakespeare class I had dreamed of for 7 semesters, I and a few fellow Tompkins fans created a website dedicated to his awesomeness. And so, *Best Ken Tompkins Week Ever* was born. For months, I jotted down funny things he'd say or do in the margins of my notebook to be immortalized online later. I then had to present this website publicly at the annual *Really, Really Big Litt and Lang Bash* that spring. With Professor Tompkins sitting right in front of me. In another testament to his great character, he smiled, laughed, and said he appreciated it.

No, Stockton will not be the same without Ken Tompkins, but it also wouldn't be what it is today without him. Cheers

to a living legacy.

For more laughs, anecdotes, and moments of, “Jeez, this guy rocks!” please visit: <http://titania.stockton.edu/bestkttweek>.

Maureen E. Egan

If I had dropped through the thatched roof of a cottage in the densest woods in England the man sitting across from me would have not been more obviously Merlyn. He was, of course, T. H. White’s Merlyn, with bristling beard, wire rimmed spectacles, and eyes that glared out from beneath a furrowed brow. I was a bit old to play Wart, but took easily enough to the part. The man seated before me was just odd enough, just engaging enough, just wonderful enough to gain almost immediately my total trust. This wizard would lead and I would follow, and the things he would turn me into along my journey would be things that I needed to be.

What made me react this way? He could certainly be difficult at times. He did without hesitation place a big red “F” on a paper he had received and hand it immediately back to the student who had dared to present shoddy work to him. He did inadvertently bump a woman in a lunch line and berate her for demanding an apology for an unintended jostling. He did pretend to stick a work of literature down the front of his pants, gyrate his hips, move his hands up and down as if to weigh something, and roll his eyes skyward when a student said she did not “like” an assigned work. “Mmm. Let me see. How does that feel,” Ken mocked. “That’s crotch criticism!”

But we loved him. We loved him in spite of and even because of his churlish behavior, because it was genuine. We had met in him one of the world’s natural and rare wonders: a person without guile. So what if the geyser blew from time to time. So what if he treated “A” grades as if he were born with only a fixed amount of them, “like a woman’s eggs” he once confessed. We

also witnessed times when he gave off light from within, when the enthusiasm that he felt for his subject spread like an infectious laugh. In those days we lived for such moments and the solar system of our lives became Kenocentric.

The magic he taught us was to see through illusion. "Call me Ken," he offered the first time I called him "Dr. Tompkins." It stunned me. The last person with a doctorate it had been my misfortune to converse with had insisted on her title, gleefully distancing herself from those below. I was set free with a word, with one magic name, to love literature for its own sake, to analyze and enjoy. A great gift to an eighteen-year-old boy, such freedom.

He taught us to despise sentimentality, and pretense, and "pseudo-intellectual crap." He taught us to do the hard work of looking inside, the intrinsic work, before moving on to the extrinsic, because what is inside is always of much greater worth than the stuff that attaches itself to the outside of things. He taught us Shakespeare, Chaucer, Medieval Romance, and even Anglo-Saxon. But, above all he taught us a method by which to analyze words on pages, to separate that which is of real value from that which is not.

My brother and my daughter followed me into Tompkinland. So did all of you at Stockton, to one extent or another whether you acknowledge it or not. Ironically, the person who taught me to treasure fantasy is also the one who taught me the importance of keeping life real. The love of unvarnished truth that Stockton embodies is a big part of his legacy there. Ken, in the thirty years that I have known you I have picked up a ridiculous amount of titles and honors. Thank you for giving me a cold and critical eye through which to view them, so that I can remember that who I really am is of greater and more lasting value.

Ridiculously now,

The Reverend Doctor Chevalier Jeffrey W. Elliott
CHC, USNR (ret), OSMTH (ELCA)
but really and thankfully just,
Jeff
Class of 1983

Mostly, I have a thanks to give. Without Ken, I would not be teaching. He reached out to me after I received my masters and asked if I would like to teach online. Ken has always supported me and believed I could reach further than I thought possible. I cannot begin to ever express fully my thanks.

Lydia Fecteau
Class of 1992

Professor Tompkins, thanks for listening, and caring; and for making Shakespeare one of my favorite authors. Good luck to you in all you do.

James Feichthaler
Class of 97

I had Tompkins (as did everyone) for Shakespeare. My preceptor was Gerry Enscoe. For those who remember, he was sort of like Wilfred Brimley – if that helps . . . Jeez. Avuncular, Teddy Bear sort of guy. KT was far scarier. He called people – even girls – by their last name.

Ken Tompkins always insisted that if we read the intros to the plays, we would have a far easier time of it. I always did – of course. One evening I was sitting outside G-Wing cafeteria at a table left over from something. Diligently buried in my Riverside anthology. The intro. All of the sudden this large finger thumps down on the page. It was the middle finger, in the way some men have of landing that particular digit very solidly. I think there was some “attaboy” or another bestowed. It was KT striding down the hall, actually come away from his path to acknowledge my poor efforts.

I felt like the receiver finger on the Sistine Chapel.

I have also remembered his assertion that having read a dozen or so of Shakespeare's plays earned us a place in a very select group in modern society.

Thanks Ken.

Regards,

Carl Ferrette
Class of 1994

Returning to Stockton as a non-traditional student, I was fortunate to encounter Ken Tompkins for my first course, *Introduction to Literature*. Aside from demanding the respect students ought to have for the institution of learning and for the professors themselves, Ken Tompkins represented the quintessential model for the intellectual pursuit of fine literature: Brilliance, showmanship, and the capacity to approach different works in different ways at different times.

I specifically remember a personal quality about Professor Tompkins. He often made reference to Nancy Tompkins. At first one might think *who is Nancy Tompkins*, but then, of course, it becomes immediately clear within context. Never once did Professor Tompkins refer to Nancy Tompkins using the possessive "my wife." I saw that as a great respect for Nancy Tompkins as well as women in general. And a great example to young men and women students.

Thank you for your fine work. Best wishes for health and happiness in your next adventures.

Kathleen (Alexy) Flanagan
Class of 1991

Whenever I used my Caxton or Titania blogs to complain about blog problems, you always came to the rescue. Thank you for paying attention to your students.

Amelia Gajary

I was just thinking about Professor Tompkins as I know he is probably thinking of me after the terrible earthquake that hit my country on January 12, 2010 and particularly my city of Port-au-Prince.

My fondest memory of Ken Tompkins is how he walked me thru his Shakespeare class I dreaded to take and postponed until the last possible semester. As a foreign student with French and Haitian Creole as primary languages, one can imagine that Shakespearian English was not my strong point.

Professor Tompkins gave me tapes of the different plays and watching them while reading along made a huge difference. Who can forget the kilt he wore when we discussed *Macbeth* and his stories of ancestries and diggings in England.

Professor Tompkins was for me an inspiration and a mentor. I was also deeply moved when he made an effort to inquire about my whereabouts when Haiti was badly hit by hurricanes in 2008 by writing to me via an old address. His letter was graciously forwarded to me by the new occupants of the house in question.

Sincerely,

Nathalie Gardere
Class of 1989

I'll never forget Ken Tompkins' class, although I took only one with him. He would start lecturing and I would take pages of notes, not wanting to miss a single word. His paper topics were challenging, and they helped me learn to think about texts in the way I would need to do as a literature grad student. He was one of the professors at Stockton who helped prepare me for a career in academia and I thank him for that.

Elaina Given
Class of 2003

As a non-traditional student in 1993/1994 I was intermittently on campus and only knew of Professor Tompkins by repute. Someone pointed him out striding the hallways one day, said that a class with him would be an experience. I never found out what kind of an experience that would be. Perhaps there is still time if he were to do a class for Stockton's older adult group. As a long-ago immigrant from northern England, it amazes me that an American could devote a lifetime to the study of English literature and language.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Goodwin
Class of 1994

I have very vivid and fond memories of Ken Tompkins. At the time I first attended Ken's classes at Stockton, e-mail was new and the Internet was text only. I was pleasantly surprised to have a literature professor who was not only computer savvy, but actually ran one of the campus' e-mail servers. During one class, he once remarked, "God hears the cries of mainframes when they

crash.” Many literature professors have taught me since that time, and Ken still ranks among the most comfortable with computer technology.

I also recollect Ken’s flair for teaching literature. He somewhat irreverently referred to *Romeo and Juliet* as “Juliet and the Jerk,” but it was effective. Instead of seeing Romeo as one half of “two lovers against the world,” I saw him (Romeo, not Ken) as a flawed being whose rash choices precipitated some of the play’s crises. And from this class, I will never forget Ken’s impassioned discussion of sonnet 130. With a clenched, shaking fist, Ken intoned, “But she is real!” – thus emphasizing his point that the speaker’s sincerity is strengthened by eschewing false flattery.

Thanks, Ken, for being a great teacher! Enjoy your semi-retirement!

Rita E. Gould
Class of 1998

When I met Professor Tompkins, he scared me a little. His booming voice, grizzled beard, and flashing eyes reminded me of Gandalf, the Grey – at his fiercest moments. I quickly learned that saying something less than intelligent in his classroom meant having those eyes single you out and, with a pointed remark, he shrank you down to Hobbit-like size. But before I decided to avoid all Medieval literature for the rest of my time at Stockton, I discovered something else: if you made a good observation in front of the Professor, he made you feel like a hero. Of course, that also meant he expected more from you, and if he didn’t get it, you could expect more grim looks or reducing remarks cast your way. For my part, I liked feeling like a hero, so I did all I could to earn the Professor’s respect. And that meant lots of studying, and as a result, a lot of learning. Quite a devious teaching technique. Thank you, Professor Tompkins (and if this comes out dumber than it sounded in my head, please don’t

give me the stare – I know I would still feel those eyes no matter where I go).

John Graziano
Class of 1993

I had Ken Tompkins for European Literature in spring 2001. One day during class, Ken stopped mid-lecture (let's say it was on *Piers Plowman*) and exclaimed, "What are those?!" to a girl sitting in the front row. The girl was wearing sandals with rainbow-colored toe socks. "Those are marvelous," Ken said (consider these quotes paraphrases). This exchange resulted in more students – and Ken himself – wearing toe socks to class later in the week. Those socks always creeped me out, so that was a rare treat.

Daniel P. Grote
Class of 2002

The Ken File. It is a truth universally acknowledged that a technology guru in possession of good information must be in want of a disciple. Ken Tompkins is the LITT program's technology guru and I am one of his followers. All of us who work closely with Ken know that he sends lots of email, usually with links to new technology that might be of interest to us for teaching and personal use, or to articles about literature and teaching and technology, and all of the intersections between them. (Ken also sends me wonderful info about sites my son might find interesting, but that's another story!) Ken tends towards short, specific titles like "Sophie 2.0," and his messages frequently consist of little more than a link and, if you're lucky, a short annotation,

such as “This ‘book’ program has many features though I’m not convinced it has more capabilities than Scrivener.” You might say, if you were paying attention, that Ken anticipated Twitter; in any case, it was invented for him. Did someone say “microblogging”?

Several years ago, I created a file in my email inbox called, simply, “Ken.” The Ken File is where I move messages I want to look at later, and there are lots and lots and lots of them. Since January, I’ve placed more than twenty different messages in the Ken File, on topics ranging from “Scholarly Editing” to “Google Wave” to “Hitler, Digital Humanities and Critical Commons.” Some of them I read and use immediately. My new 3-D desktop program, BumpTop, which lets me create sticky notes to post on my virtual wall – that’s from the Ken File. Zotero – a bibliographic citation program I use daily – from the Ken File too.

But the Ken File has prompted me to change more than the tools I use on my computer or in the classroom or for research. Ken and his emails have changed me from a person who was generally interested in new media (and its role in literary studies) to an avid user, even occasionally an early adopter, of innovations such as blogging, social networking, document sharing, and many more. I started blogging actively after reading around on Blog Sisters, a site that I learned about from a link Ken sent. I then became a member of Blog Sisters for a while. While I no longer maintain a personal blog, I continue to use blogs and have students create blogs for class projects. A few years ago, I joined Facebook after reading an article on social networking, and recently, created the LITT program’s Facebook fan page. I’m updating and tweeting instead of blogging these days. That’s another thing I learned from the Ken File: embrace change. Beyond sending those emails, Ken has supported and encouraged me to experiment, to explore, to play. He has helped me to see myself as much more than a consumer of technology and digital culture, as a co-creator of knowledge in the brave new digital commons. I’m no guru, but I know that my teaching has been strengthened and my ideas sharpened from ideas, tips, and conversations begun in the Ken File.

By the way, Ken also tweets these days, and I follow his Twit-

ter feed. There's more good stuff there, and it's all conveniently logged on his page. Anyone can become a disciple now. But he'd better not stop sending me email.

Deb Gussman

Ken Tompkins was a major influence in my decision to continue my studies in literature, which eventually led to my earning a PhD in English. Not all of my professors made such a lasting impression on me, but then, Tompkins' high expectations of students were seldom matched by other academics in my education.

I transferred to Stockton in the Fall Semester 1990 after completing my Associate of Arts at Atlantic Community College. I had just decided that I would major in the Literature and Language program, and Ken Tompkins was my professor for LIT 1100, *Introduction to Literature*. The writing intensive course had three assignments, the first of which was a character study in short fiction. I wrote about Susan Rawlings from Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen," and having been accustomed to receiving A's, the grade of B- and Tompkins' end comment made me feel like a deflated balloon, shriveled from lack of air: "OK, though you slide into summary frequently, you write well. Now if I can get you to analyze." Those words challenged me to work harder and to learn how to think more critically about the text.

The second paper was an analysis of setting in poetry, and I wrote about several poems: Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" and "Filling Station"; Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"; and Countee Cullen's "Incident." I was pleased to see Tompkins' single comment on the last page, "Good show! B+." I was making progress.

The final topic was in drama, a question about *Death of a Salesman* and whether Willy Loman realizes himself at the end of the play. In minimalist fashion, Tompkins simply placed the grade

of A on the last page, with which I was pleased. I worked hard that semester and went on to take two more courses from Tompkins.

In Spring Semester 1991, I enrolled in LITT 1201 *Approaches to Literature*, one of the best and most useful courses I ever had as an undergraduate. In the syllabus, Tompkins wrote, “You probably won’t have another course like it,” and he wasn’t kidding. His approach to the course was like a contract; he would teach and students were expected to work:

Approaches to Literature is really a course in problem-solving. If you look at literature analytically, you have to look at it as a series of problems needing solutions. You need to know where to start and, perhaps more important, where to end. That’s what I am going to be concerned about until May. I’ll change the course, substitute readings, push you hard, expect fine work, make you angry and try to offend you at least once in a week. So what else is new? If you want predictability, go take Biology.

Tompkins made good on every one of his declarations, and I was grateful for what I learned.

One of the first assignments was to rewrite a short anecdote, providing a narrative structure with setting, characters, and plot, as well as a reflective paragraph explaining the choices made. After working on explications, analyses, and criticisms of poetry, one of the major writing assignments was a source study on Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, for which Tompkins wrote on my paper, “Nicely and carefully done – A.” Many years later, as an instructor, I understood how the structure of this course must have nearly eliminated any chance of plagiarism because of the creative nature of many of the shorter assignments. The final exam consisted of reading John Barth’s short story “Night-Sea Journey,” applying formalist criticism, and choosing one other criticism of the student’s choice. At the time, I had no concept of how instructors graded papers, but now, having graded final papers at the end of a semester, I understand how there can be few marks or comments on them. Tompkins wrote, “Nice – A.” I took great satisfaction in that grade because I worked hard to

understand and to write about the material; but I was only able to do well because of Tompkins' lectures and rigorous assignments that built upon one another, helping the student learn how to create a methodology for approaching literature.

I had one more course with Tompkins in the Fall Semester 1991 – *Chaucer*. He assigned two long papers, a mid-term exam, and a final exam. Another example of his pedagogy that stands out in my mind happened after the mid-term exam. He sat down and wrote his answers to the exam questions:

Here are my responses to the questions I asked you to write on. I give you mine not because they are perfect – I tried to do each of them within a 20-minute period – but because I thought they might help you see what goes on in my head when faced with the same problems you faced. I assumed – as you should have – that you have read the piece, that you have been in class, and that you've thought about it.

Again, when students were having difficulty, Tompkins tried to model the kind of thinking and writing that he expected, not just talking about them but showing them in writing. And I received a grade of A for the course.

Much of my success as a student and teacher of literature, I owe to Tompkins. He certainly deserves any and all praise for his teaching career, for imparting to students that the study of literature is important work. I wish him continued success as professor emeritus and hope that his future students realize how fortunate they are to have him as their professor.

Patrice Hollrah
Class of 1992

While there are many things I love and appreciate about Ken Tompkins as a colleague – his embrace of new ideas and

technologies as well as his commitment to the literature program and its mission – what I will miss most about him when he retires is our fights.

Ken and I are the literature program's hotheads. And while we often agree (since the program has always had a remarkable record for reaching consensus) when we don't, neither of us is afraid to say so – bluntly and loudly. This has been the case since I began my career at Stockton in 1995. While traditional ideas and models in academia would suggest that junior faculty be careful in the positions they take so as not to rile their senior colleagues and jeopardize their chances at tenure, our program has never worked that way. And while it would be easy to pat myself on the back for being brave and willing to speak my mind (consequences be damned!), the real hero in this scenario is Ken.

The fact is that if Ken were a different sort of senior colleague, such exchanges would not have been possible. He would have pulled rank and shut me down in meetings or outside of them – letting me say my piece but then working behind the scenes to be sure that he got his way. But Ken doesn't pull rank. Our program functions as a democracy. All voices are heard; all work and rewards are shared. The majority position carries – no matter what that position is or who constitutes the majority.

So Ken and I fight – about program requirements and needs, about classroom practice, about strategies for dealing with the administration. We fight openly and with passion, but, ultimately, we fight fairly. And when we're done fighting, we tease each other as a transition back to being friends. He calls me insufferably bossy, I call him an old crank, and we move on. He asks me about how my son is adjusting to middle school; I ask about his daughter's new job in Washington. I can think of few other people in my life with whom I can fight without penalty or recrimination. Our relationship is valuable and special to me for that reason. So I'll miss our fights . . . not to mention the fact that I usually win.

Isn't that right, Ken?

Lisa Honaker

I transferred to Stockton in Fall 1989 as a Business Major. I have always loved literature. My favorite class in High School was always English class. However, somehow, I decided to declare myself as a Business Management major in college.

Spring semester of 1990 I took Ken's *Medieval Literature* class as an elective. Simply because I love literature! I wanted to take a class to offset the dry, boring business classes I was enrolled in. Ken was a tough professor! I wrote a small paper – I think it was regarding Njal's Saga – and Ken gave me a grade of B, along with some comments on what I wrote. After class I asked him about one of the comments. He looked at me sternly and asked who I was. He said he was not familiar with me. I said, "Oh, I'm not a Literature major. I'm actually a business major." He looked at me again and told me I should be a Literature major.

I had a revelation. I promptly went to my then-boyfriend (now husband) and told him I was changing my major to Literature. Then I went to the Registrar's office and proceeded to do the work to change my major to Literature. I graduated in 1992 and was accepted to Montclair State University's Masters program for English Lit. Ken wrote a very nice recommendation for me, that I do believe assisted in my acceptance. I was very grateful.

I graduated from Montclair with a M.A. in English Literature in 1997.

Irony: I wound up working in the business world anyway. For over 10 years I did marketing in the Architectural/Engineering field!

But it was because of Ken Tompkins that I decided to follow my passion for literature when I was back in college. I am forever grateful for that. And I never did get an "A" grade on any paper I submitted in any of his classes! I think my best was a B+. Like I said, he was tough!

Valerie Yearicks Hughes
Class of 1992

A lot of different thoughts went through my mind regarding the news of KT's retirement; I eventually settled on writing a sonnet, since Ken was the first to fully explain the form to me.

Part-Time Ken

Sitting for want of a muse of fire
We mull over a professional life—
He who would find a way to retire,
He whose very words would cut like a knife.
So much to consider; so little space.
Some would say he was a friend of the bard:
Those who would underestimate his place
Among those with whom he has high regard.
He spoke of the life of the metaphor
And anthropomorphic character work—
As a literary expositor,
Responsibility never to shirk.
Groanings too deep for words watch him depart,
Students no longer, wisdom to impart.

Kevin Hutchins
Class of 2003

Dating Ken Tompkins

*For certain words he spake against your grace
In your retirement, I had swing'd him soundly
—Act V, Scene I, Measure for Measure*

It seems odd to write a 'remembrance' about someone I just saw yesterday. Ken and I met for coffee: I missed a meeting and he offered to fill me in, and he also agreed to give me some computer advice. This meeting was not unusual. Whether we meet

with a professional purpose or just because we haven't seen each other in a while, Ken and I will make a date from time to time: we chat over coffee or Thai or occasionally Greek cuisine. Sometimes his wife Nancy joins us – which is always a treat. When my family visits they ask if Ken and Nancy are free for dinner. During this most recent meeting, like the others, we ordered, sipped our drinks, and got down to business, which also meant that our conversation ranged far and near to our stated purposes. On this date we ended up talking for hours. I didn't notice the time passing, and we both apologized for keeping the other so long. When we noticed the hour, we rushed out – sort of – chatting in the freezing parking lot before driving away. While we haven't set the date for our next rendezvous, I have already put in my vote for a Thai dinner with Nancy.

So, you could say that – more or less – I have been dating Ken Tompkins for five years now. After all, starting a teaching job is a little like dating: both parties check each other out for a time and then the parties move on to new relationships or their relationship moves to the next level. Getting to know Ken during my probationary time has been one of many pleasures related to working at Stockton. And, without a doubt, I've fallen for him, which is to say I've fallen for Stockton. In so many ways, as I've learned and experienced for the past five years, the two – Ken and Stockton – are inextricable. They have made their mark on each other and, as Ken was here from “even before the beginning” of the college, they celebrate their milestones together.

I greatly appreciate all Ken has done and continues to do to initiate me into my relationship with the College, the Literature program, and the teaching profession more generally. My own college milestones are connected to Ken: I will get tenure and promotion in the same year, Fall 2010, that Ken that moves to emeritus status. Thus, dating Ken extends to the word's second meaning, as is proper in this book that commemorates his retirement: the process of establishing age. The brief measure of age I sketch here reveals that Ken's teaching accomplishments and impact on his colleagues (me, particularly) bear out Chaucer's sentiment regarding life, art, and love:

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conquering,
The dredful joye, alwey that slit so yerne:
Al this mene I by Love, that my felynge
Astonyeth with his wonderful werkyng
So sore iwis, that whan I on him thynke
Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke.
(*The Parliament of Fowls*, lines 1-7)

The life so brief, the art so long in the learning,
The attempt so hard, the conquest so sharp,
the fearful joy that ever slips away so quickly—
by all this I mean love, which so sorely
astounds my feeling with its wondrous operation,
that when I think upon it
I scarce know whether I wake or sleep.

(translation source: <http://www.ummmaine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer/translation/pf/pf.pdf>)

That is to say, I thank Ken for the “fearful joy” of his teaching. It is an astonishing craft, a “wondrous operation”: long practiced and incomplete.

Kristin J. Jacobson

I didn't have many classes with Professor Tompkins. I did take a class in *Shakespeare*, in which he was the professor. I have never been a Shakespeare fan, but Professor Tompkins frequently tried to make the readings interesting and real. He supplemented some plays with video recordings, allowing the visual and auditory learners see and hear the text. This effort made comprehension of Shakespeare's style of writing easier. I now have an appreciation of William Shakespeare and have purchased several movies and (children-related) books that feature his work.

Marjorie Jaynes
Class of 1998

I wanted to share an anecdote about Dr. Tompkins. In the days that I was a student at Stockton, it was pre-Internet, desktop graphic design, and owning your own wireless laptop . . . let alone an ipod!

Dr. Tompkins taught a class on page layout using the *Pagemaker* program, which I believe directly attributed to my career in health care publishing. After Stockton, I was hired as a medical writer most likely because I knew *Pagemaker* (and could do the layouts of the publications). This evolved into learning *Quark*, and then *Adobe Creative Suite*, but my point is that Dr. Tompkins expertly taught Chaucer, Shakespeare and *Pagemaker*, which helped forge my professional path (and my ongoing love of literature). His affection for computer technology inspired me to always keep an open mind and grow with the times.

I wish him only the best.

Take care,

Danielle (Casciello) Kane
Class of 1991

Some time ago I came across a picture of Diogenes the philosopher, and it reminded me of Ken Tompkins in strangely contradictory ways. The nineteenth-century painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme shows the philosopher in a pottery tub – a big one that he rolled from place to place – the only shelter he allowed himself. While I know that Ken has a lovely home and family, and that they mean a great deal to him, he is also a man at home rolling through the world – if not this world in a real tub, then

a world of ideas in a metaphorical tub – and as he rolls along he carefully considers every new prospect. In the picture, the hard bottom of the tub is cushioned by a bit of straw; a primitive walking stick with a ragged cloth bag leans against the tub. At first this seems wrong. I am reminded that Ken likes the finer things in life – iPhones, Starbucks coffee, Ugg boots, excellent bagpipes – but then I consider that he easily makes do with simple material that comes to hand. Ask for a Bash treat and he makes tasty bean soup; under fund a project and he'll do the handywork himself (as he wired Stockton's first computer lab); more than once I've found him stretched out in his garage, wrench in hand, working on his motorcycle. The dogs in the picture also strike a strange note. Ken is allergic to animals. But perhaps I shouldn't see them as *dogs* but rather as followers, those who have come to snuff the rarefied air and to learn from him. If so, I number myself among those dogs. Often, at the end of a day I have wandered down to Ken's office just to see what he is doing. The half-naked pose and buff physique do not entirely fit, but the beard and shaggy hair do. So does his preoccupation with the lamp. To G r me it represented the lamp that Diogenes used to search for an honest man. For me it represents the light of learning that Ken constantly tinkers with. Constantly. Never does he stop trying to make it brighter or more intense or more effective. I've never met any professor – certainly not one with Ken's experience – who prepared more thoroughly when teaching a new course or who so frequently recast old courses in new ways and with new technologies (which then called for his oh-so-thorough preparation). The way he futzes with that lamp you'd think it meant the world to him. The tub? Not important. Neither is the city in the background; nor even the edifice at whose foot he sits. Nope, just the light, and the idea that he can use it to help illuminate the way for others.

Tom Kinsella

I like to joke and say that I am a late, late bloomer, and that it only took me 14 years to earn my Bachelor's degree. After going to school part-time while my children were growing up, and moving to New Jersey, I was finally able to enroll in school full time in the fall of 2005. My very first class at Stockton was *Literary Methodologies*. It was literally my first class, I had it first thing in the morning, and my teacher was Ken Tompkins. I can remember walking into the room and finding a seat, a seat I remained in for the rest of the semester. There were already a number of students in the class and some were talking with one another. Little did I know that the man sitting in the back of the room was the professor. I had noticed him. Being an older student, it was my habit to look around the room and notice who else might be considered a "non-traditional" student, but what I remember most with my back to him was the friendly conversation he was making with whoever was sitting near him. When it was time for the class to begin he walked to the front of the room and introduced himself. I liked him immediately.

I loved his teaching style; you could tell he was passionate about the material by his own excitement with a theory, an explanation, a reading, or a student's idea. I can also remember the first assignment we had – to decipher a poem in terms of what the author was really trying to say. I struggled with it, even though he gave us an example of what needed to be done by sharing the work of a former student. A few after-class discussions and two or three emails later, I turned in my assignment; I think I got a B, and knew I still hadn't quite been able to get to the heart of the matter. What I did know after that, however, was that I had a teacher who cared very much about my work, and appreciated my efforts. The class continued; we were given other assignments, mostly poems if I remember correctly, and I feel I wrote two of the best papers I have ever written in that class; one on Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl," and the other on "Hospital Parking Garage." Ken taught me what to look for, how to get inside a piece of work and understand the craft of the author, so that I could write a rich, meaningful, well-crafted paper myself. I remember learning about how to open a paper using "the long

jump,” and used it in other classes with other papers as well. I knew I would miss the class and Ken Tompkins when the semester ended and was happy to know I would have him again as my teacher the following year for Shakespeare.

Ken Tompkins not only taught me about literary methods and Shakespeare, but also helped build my confidence as a student and person. He sought me out and gave me the opportunity of tutoring a student who was struggling in his literary methodology class the following semester, and because of his comments both written and oral, gave me the courage to submit a paper or two into the annual literature contest for Litt students.

As one of his students, I was able to see that Ken Tompkins was and is not only passionate about the material he teaches, but about life itself. I loved that he had strong opinions about people, about Stockton, about issues, so much so, that I think to some he could be a bit intimidating. He was not afraid to share his political views, and I am happy to say I shared them. We shared a chuckle from time to time; one particular day I walked into class and noticed Professor Tompkins wearing something around his upper arm. I asked if it was some kind of heart monitor and he informed me it was for a Podcast test, and I wouldn't have assumed it was a heart monitor on a younger teacher! I learned a little about his children, knew they were all adopted, something else I admired about him. We heard about Nancy Tompkins – which is always the way he referred to his wife – and it seemed that after many years, theirs is still a good relationship. Ken was also my preceptor, and I enjoyed seeing him in his office, a space that revealed even more of his personality with the pictures, posters, and sayings displayed on the walls. This bagpipe playing, motorcycle riding, dedicated, passionate teacher with a great presence will be missed by students and faculty alike, that I am sure of. Ken Tompkins liked me, which I could sense, and the feelings were mutual. I also know that he cared about me not only as a Litt student, but as a person, and I think that is probably true for every one of his students. I wish you the best Professor Tompkins, enjoy the ride. I know you have so far!

Sandy Koch
Class of 2007

I have never really been affected by a college professor's lecture before, not that I can remember, anyway. I've felt smarter, sure, as well as excited afterward, but as far as walking out of a classroom feeling *changed*, I can't say this has ever happened. I can also say (with confidence) I have never liked Shakespeare all that much, either. In high school I wasn't a very good student, not at all, but I did love to read, mostly Stephen King novels and H. P. Lovecraft short stories (I would usually skip class and sneak out to my car if I was ever itchin' to finish a novel). I remember attempting to read *Romeo and Juliette* but found the play to be utterly impenetrable, boring, tedious, et cetera. It didn't help all that much either that the teacher I had hated Shakespeare just as much as the class did, which made the last semester of my senior year hellish. So it's safe to say I wasn't looking forward to taking a class dedicated completely to Bill Shakespeare, not to mention the fact that I was going to have to read fourteen (!) plays in all. But, alas, I am a LITT major, and Shakespeare is part of the requirement.

What could I do?

Fast forward to the fourth week before the last week of the semester – now. I am still in Shakespeare, but things have changed, drastically. I cannot stop reading the plays, for one thing, and the reason is because I want to *understand* them, completely, especially the tragedies. No other character in literature has ever fascinated me as much as Hamlet does. I can see myself in him, at some points, but that is another story all together.

Why, though? Why am I so interested in these plays, suddenly? Above, I said that I have never been affected by a college professor's lecture before. This has changed, as well. Not only have Professor Tompkins' lectures affected me, but they continue to do so. I have never seen or heard anyone get so excited over

a moldy copy of *The Riverside Shakespeare*, or any book for that matter, as he does. But he does it in a way that gets everyone else around him excited, as well – that’s the trick. I’m trying desperately to figure out a way to describe what he does during class in writing, but it’s extremely difficult. So, for the sake of my sanity, I’ll give the best example I can.

During his introduction for *Measure for Measure*, Professor Tompkins started talking about the pain that others have to go through in order for people like us to be happy, something obviously related to the dilemma Isabella has to face involving her brother, but, at the same time, it was so much more than that. This is a simple concept, the pain of others, something that happens daily to unfortunates all over the world (think of where diamonds come from, for example), but it just doesn’t get much thought; no one gives a damn. What Professor Tompkins did was force the class to turn the text on themselves, to really dig deep inside and feel what Isabella was feeling, feel the pain, a word he used in his lecture repeatedly. And, in the end, for me, anyway, it worked. I felt what Isabella was feeling, and I grew an almost instantaneous attachment to her because of it.

This is why I became a LITT major to begin with. Literature, words, like music, is a beautiful beast that takes many forms. Would I have ever read Shakespeare if it wasn’t for the mandatory course? Maybe. But would I have enjoyed the stuff as much as I do now? Would I have given it all a fair shot? No. That’s pretty much what it all comes down to.

Nick Leonetti

I remember Professor Tompkins teaching me the “long jump” in introductions to essays and the advice to dazzle readers by choosing an interpretation of the text that would not immediately enter the mind. He encouraged us to dig deeper than our surface reactions to emerge as better readers, writers, and thinkers. One

could truly be proud to earn an A on a paper for KT because he set the bar high, which I admire.

Kathleen Leo

Professor Tompkins, there are many things that I appreciate from the years of classes that I took with you. The memory that sticks out predominantly for me is one of the earliest. During my first semester at Stockton I took *Intro to Lit Methodologies* from you. Our first assignment was to interpret a sonnet. When I received the assignment back, and read the comments, you had told me that I had gotten something absolutely wrong. I was not even remotely close to getting the sonnet's line interpreted correctly. From that one incorrect line, I had gotten the entire concept of the sonnet wrong. You even used me as an anonymous example in class to demonstrate just how off-base people had been in their papers.

Having gone to a small public school, no teacher had previously said that I was totally incorrect in my analysis of a text. By not coddling me, you forced me to grow up, to be more accountable, and to put in the effort that assignments deserve.

Thank you for not accepting my BS assignment and for asking more of me. I am currently in my last semester of classes before obtaining a masters degree.

Lori Lepelletier
Class of 2007

In the 11 years since I graduated as a Literature major at Stockton, I have many times quoted my professors and shared their brilliant ideas. No one has been elevated to the level of Professor

Ken Tompkins. His name has morphed into many forms and is a part of my daily vocabulary:

“He’s a good professor, but he’s no Tompkins.”

“The delivery was Tompkins-esque: it was brilliant.”

“Professor Tompkins would have a coronary over that explanation.”

“I don’t need your Tompkinsonian interpretation, just tell me if I should use a comma or split the sentence.”

It does not matter whether the person with whom I am having the conversation knows Ken Tompkins. I do, and that is enough.

In 1999 I got lucky. I was chosen to record an oral history of The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. As anyone who has ever heard Ken Tompkins, a.k.a. Stockton’s Ancient Mariner, talk about the early days, he was there at the very colorful beginning – the days of the Mayflower Hotel.

Listening to Ken Tompkins talk about the start of my college was like overhearing my parents talk about my birth. His words were heavy with love, excitement and pride. It made *me* feel proud to attend a college with such an intelligent and thoughtful history. Trust me when I say, I have gotten on my Stockton soap box – crafted by Ken Tompkins – many times.

I am lucky – not just because I heard Ken Tompkins tell me about the early days of the college or because I experienced the many layers of Shakespeare’s works in his class. I am lucky because I had a number of conversations with Ken Tompkins. Anyone who has ever had a conversation with this man knows that you walk away from that conversation a wiser person – I don’t care if you just asked for directions to the cafeteria! Ken Tompkins is a wise man, and he is generous with his wisdom.

Ken Tompkins’ wisdom will be shared with at least another generation through me. I am pursuing a degree in Secondary Education, English. I may not be able to recreate his booming voice or theatrical flair (I’ll sure try), but I will share his knowledge of Shakespeare, his love of teaching and constant learning, his curiosity in how people think. In short, I will try to be half the teacher he is.

I am happy to learn that Ken Tompkins will not be leaving Stockton altogether. I am happy to know that my professor will continue to inspire students from my alma mater the same way he inspired me. But I also know that any student who ever attends The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey benefits from the wisdom, energy and love of Ken Tompkins.

Heather Martin
Class of 1999

I heard of Ken Tompkins several years before I actually met him. Oddly enough, I first heard his name mentioned in a tavern. In the wee small hours of New Year's morning, 1985, I had met a young woman in a local bar. She said her name was "Gin." It used to be "Rum," she said. We got to know one another and compared bona fides. There were many similarities in our backgrounds, both deep and superficial. We were both college dropouts. We were both intelligent people working in an industry that did not reward our intelligence. We both liked to drink in dives, like the one we were currently in. We both shared a childhood dream of becoming an astronaut. We even had the same kind of wallet and cheap watch. The longer she spoke about herself the more I felt like I was looking into a mirror. Oh, we had our differences to be sure. Where I was curious, she was secretive. Where I was slow to anger, she was a short fuse. Most telling, while I had my own opinions, she seemed to be unduly influenced by the opinions of other people: the wrong people.

As the talk and the taps continued to flow, Gin kept referring to someone named "Ken Tompkins." It was a lot of "Ken Tompkins says this!" and "Ken Tompkins says that!" It was all very much the world according to Ken Tompkins. This went on for a while until she disagreed with me on the say-so of a man who wasn't even present: "You're wrong! Ken Tompkins says..." In exasperation I finally asked, "Who the hell is Ken Tomp-

kins?!!!" Gin angrily replied, "I can't believe that you don't know anyone from Stockton!!" I did mention the short fuse, right?

Our relationship lasted about three months until one terrible night when she left me after she banged her head repeatedly on the steering wheel of her car while yelling, "I CAN'T LOVE YOU!...I CAN'T LOVE YOU!...GROW UP!...JUST GROW UP!!"

But I digress.

With Gin's dramatic departure (which left a hole in my heart just large enough to pass the Battlestar Galactica through) I thought that I had heard the last of Ken Tompkins – whoever he was. Yet, fate – that laughing trickster with a grin as wide as the cosmos – had other plans for me. Five years later I found myself enrolled at Stockton and needing the signature of someone named "Ken Tompkins" to get into an overbooked class. I had always been bright: a child prodigy if truth be told, and dropping out of college back in 1976 had had a devastating effect on my life, income, and spirit. Even though I considered Stockton to be small potatoes, for the first time in years I was genuinely excited about the prospect of finishing college and fulfilling my destiny.

When I went to Tompkins' office I discovered him advising one of his preceptees: a young woman tried to wheedle him into approving of something that he clearly didn't approve of while he yelled "no! No! NO!" It looked like the scene in *Citizen Kane* where the Marion Davies character is berated by her frustrated opera coach. Tompkins noticed me observing him, and he replied that he was sorry – he clearly wasn't – but he takes his advising duties seriously. I explained that I needed his signature for my class and he gave me a letter-size piece of paper with his signature taking up most of the page.

I was soon an adult student in a classroom of teenagers and early-twenty-somethings. I was a little nervous about being perceived as "different," or even worse, older. Right away in my first class with him, Tompkins put me at ease by telling the class why he doesn't wear a tie. I was the only one in class wearing a tie. As he lectured he would often make his point by bringing up cultural and historical references to people, places, events, and organizations from the sixties. Since most of the students were

too young to know about these kinds of things, I alone would respond to his comments. It soon reached a point where the class seemed more like a dialogue between Tompkins and me instead of a lecture. And how did Tompkins reward my display of an almost cyclopedian memory? He told the class that I was an undercover agent of the CIA; that I was his “memory baffle”; and he referred to me as “Data” from Star Trek the Next Generation. As comments like these continued I began to wonder if he was going to hold my brief association with Gin against me in some fashion. Of course, he was a professional academic and would never stoop so low as to use a classroom and lesson plan to harass a student. It must have been my imagination.

Tompkins would often read aloud from our texts. I still recall that one of his first readings was from Wordsworth: “...Great God! I'd rather be a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn...”

He sounded like he meant it too.

His voice was fascinating. His robust Scottish burr sounded like a cross between Sean Connery, John Huston, & Wilford Brimley. Even today I can't watch Tom Cruise's *The Firm* without hearing echoes of Tompkins voice as Brimley's character speaks. Ken liked to read aloud. He read to us sections of “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,” “Home Burial,” “Good Country People,” and *Othello*. After he read my analysis of “The Man Who Lived Underground” to the class I went up and formerly introduced myself to him. When I told him I worked in the library he asked me if I knew some guy named Frank whom he described as “the devil himself!” Well, he would know.

Put at ease by Ken's – notice that now it's “Ken” – seemingly high praise of my paper, I began to enjoy his classes in earnest. I grew enthralled by the man's intelligence and creativity. Oh, he was both dramatic and theatrical in his presentations, as only the best teachers are. I looked forward to each of his classes and lectures. However, I did have one small problem with the man though: his perception of the range of my knowledge. In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr. John H. Watson briefly comments on his new roommate's education and he observes that while Holmes knew a lot about exotic poisons, tobaccos, and un-

derworld argot, he knew very little about astronomy or any mathematics that did not involve chemistry or firearms. His education was spotty. Similarly, just because I might know a lot about “A” and a little about “B,” Ken would often assume that I must know something about “C,” “D,” and “E.” This caused me some consternation in class when I was expected to discuss things like the *Commedia dell’ arte* – which I knew nothing about – or picaresque novels and characters. This misperception on his part was no doubt responsible for a lot of other misunderstandings down the road.

When I filled out the student evaluation of Ken’s class I wrote that the man should be cloned or a hologram should be made of him so that future generations could enjoy his intelligence and wit. Ken helped awaken in me the hope that I might have a career in academia to fill the lonely hours while I awaited Gin’s return from her green world. Based on my experiences, hope has always been a rare missing element from my life. I took three more courses with Ken. With each class and completed assignment I began to feel a confidence in my abilities that I had never felt before. Ken was my maestro and I his apt pupil.

Ken sometimes took a collaborative approach to teaching. I recall that he once had professors Mench and Hannon visit the class and read aloud passages from *To the Lighthouse*, some poetry about Diana, and some prose work about women having abortions. As much as I enjoyed his classes I still couldn’t help but wonder just what was the nature of his relationship with Gin, and whether or not there was a sub textual meaning to some of his odder comments. For example, he assigned us a poem about lost gloves – and honor, and I had left my gloves in her car. He ridiculed a character in a play who left love notes in the trees, and I used to leave love notes on the high score areas of coin-operated videogames in bars that she frequented. He asked the class if we would like to see a photograph of “Ginny and Bob” having sex in a motel as an introduction to *Othello*. Indeed, well I recall that he posited the essence of moral culpability in *Othello* by asking us if a projectionist who merely flicks the switch on a movie projector is as morally culpable for a pornographic movie as the film’s

creators and actors were. Thus, Iago flicked Othello's "switch" by arousing his innate jealousy. Based on my experiences I would have to say yes: the person who flicks the switch is morally culpable, but I'm sure Ken would disagree.

In closing, my opinion of Ken as a teacher still hasn't changed. I would still clone, bronze, or holodeck him. Scholar, counselor, father, and motorcycle rider, I don't have the words or the space to discuss all the dimensions of Ken's identity. Probably the best description of the man can be found in a passage from Bruce Jay Friedman's play, *Steambath*, which Ken once read to my class. The speaker is a character only identified as "Oldtimer." (I can hear Ken already: "Note that subtle one-upsmanship! Mr. McGettigan is suggesting that I am an old man!")

"Well that's OK. I done everything. I once had a pair of perfectly matched wooden-legged frauleins powder me up from head to toe and dress me up in silk drawers. I bumped up against a Greek sailor walking around for thirty years with a lump on his chest he took to be a natural growth. Turned out to be the unborn foetus of a twin brother he'd spent all his life hankering for. I seen most everything. I dipped my beak in Madrid, Spain; Calcutta, India; Leningrad, Russia, and I never once worried about them poisoning the water. I had myself the fifth richest woman in Sidney, Australia, genuine duchess she was, all dressed up in a tiger suit; and by the time I finished with her I had them stripes going the wrong way. I played a pretty good trumpet. I had to face the fact that I was no Harry James, but then again Sir Harry couldn't go in there and break up a Polish wedding the way I could. I talked back to the biggest guys. Didn't bother me. I didn't care if it was me way down in the valley, hollering up at Mt. Zion. I'd holler up some terrific retorts. You're not going to show me anything I haven't seen. I paid my dues. And I'll tell you something else. If there's anything in there kicks me, you watch and see if I don't bite."

As the character, the "P. R. Attendant" – who may be more than he seems – responds:

"The old man had a lot of balls."

That's Ken.
The old man has a lot of balls.

J. P. McGettigan
Class of 1996

I have always described Ken Tompkins' classes as a "title wave of information." I still hear his voice in my head whenever I teach Shakespeare. Sometimes a student will ask an obscure question about one of his plays and the answer will seemingly come from nowhere. I would ask myself "How did I know that?" Tompkins, that's how. My theory is that the reason Ken knew so much about Shakespeare is because he went to school with him.

He was and always will be a Stockton legend.

As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free
The Tempest

Be free my friend, all the best.

Tom McParland
Class of 2003

As a teacher of English for 21 years and a graduate of Stockton in 1989 I always refer to my "Intro to Shakespeare class" when I begin my drama unit with my classes.

One thing I'll never forget about Professor Tompkins is how he called Iago "the pornographic director" as we discussed *Othello*. I realize this may not be an appropriate anecdote to publish, but it's something I'll always remember and helped me

characterize Iago as well as Othello's weakness.

Also, "Dane Bramage"

Enjoy the day,

Will Mendo

Class of 1989

December 5, 2009 (11:04am)

I love you, Sparky. I know where to begin, but I have stared at those first four heartfelt words for well over an hour now. All else is ancillary and pales in comparison. I sit here smiling, pull dusty books from shelves where they have lived for years now, laugh, cry, and remember how warm and enveloping your hugs are. I have not been the best friend to you in these past few years; life insists on intruding on life. It only takes moments to reach out; yet, we do not always do so. My apologies. No one has touched my life – intellectual, academic, emotional, spiritual – in the way you have. It seems trite, and words are not fitting, but I will do my best to honor my most treasured professor, mentor, and dearest friend.

I remember meeting you. I was with a friend who was seeking your signature. You knew who I was, presumably from Web Caucus, and asked how I had managed so successfully to avoid you thus far in my time at Stockton. Your smile was warm, charming, and disarming. Were the stories of the "horrible Tompkins" true? It did not seem possible. I stumbled over myself telling you I was not avoiding you, but that you had not fit into my schedule yet. I was lying – you knew it and I knew you knew. I dove in and took Shakespeare.

Shakespeare with Tompkins. Wow! The way you thought about literature blew my mind!

Yeah, Kinsella was great, but Tompkins . . . Tompkins was an *experience*. I was transported by the way you spoke, interpreted,

diagrammed, incorporated ideas from film and television into your lectures, moved about the room while lecturing, and hung like a large bird of prey with claws hooked into the edge of the lectern. Years later, I asked you about those fingernails, but at the time, they were a source of mythology to me and other students. Once, before class, you descended on me, sitting down next to me. You wondered aloud that I had gone soft; a Caucus post I made about how pearls and the silvery light of the full moon were two of my favorite things had shocked you. Every single time you were about to return papers or exams, you would go through the laundry list of things students had done wrong; I would shrink lower and lower in my seat, avoid your eye, and fidget since I just *knew* you were addressing me and all of my flaws. Then, I would get an A and some of the kindest, thought-provoking commentary scrawled all over my paper. In all the classes I took with you, that feeling never went away. Each time I teach Shakespeare I channel that Tompkins energy, method, and love of the material.

Renaissance Lit was another mind-blowing experience. I did some of my best thinking and writing about literature in that course. Even though you gave us oodles of background, you still insisted that all we needed to know about a text was in the text. In Medieval Lit, I rediscovered a passion I had had for the older texts and you inspired me to paths of research and inquiry I had never experienced before. For the first time, I considered a future in research and teaching. You encouraged that by having me research secondary texts for your Chaucer course. I became your “research assistant.” You cared for me as a single parent and even managed to make sure I was paid for my efforts; I would have done it for free. I wanted nothing more than to please you and make you proud that you had asked me. If you saw any intellectual gift or promise in me it was as secondary as those texts. I did similar work, and not very well, for your technology based Visualizing in the Humanities course. Senior Seminar was literally and figuratively a capstone achievement. Your love of Jung, archetypes, and Frye has been burned into my brain and soul. Again, I only wanted you to be proud and never feel as if

the kudos you continued to shower on me was unwarranted. Senior Sem has been the source for my honors 12 course offerings in teaching archetypes, the monomyth, heroes, and mythology. When you and I did an independent study of Old English literature, I felt stupid, and probably was, but you never let me feel that way. If not for that experience, I would never have done more independent study on Old English, its origins, and would not currently be reading through 700 plus pages of medieval Icelandic sagas.

The Search for the Grail. What can I say? Once again, you pushed me. Once again, I only wanted to make you proud. Once again, I felt as if I fell short and know that I did. For the first time you truly terrified and frustrated me. I cowered and cried to Kinsella who told me just to talk to you. You listened to me, cared about me, and without you I would never have thought to try to win the fellowship in the first place. I would never have thought to stand before a classroom as instructor. You never made me feel like a bumbling, overreaching undergraduate, though; I did that to myself. You prepared me then in ways I only realized much later.

Our Chaucer group took a trip to The Cloisters. It rained most of the day, but was a perfect day nonetheless. I bought an elaborate counted crosstitch of a medieval garden that day. I worked diligently on it and gave it to you as a token of my love and esteem for you. You, Nancy Tompkins, and I went to many medieval conferences at Penn State. We grew closer and your concern for me, and mine for you, grew deeper. Good times at those conferences! Good times. You made me feel like a colleague, told so many stories about the history of Stockton, your experiences at Wharrah Percy, your life as an academic, and more. Those times with you and Nancy are some of my fondest memories.

You cared for me on a personal level in a way that few people in my life ever have. Your care, trust, and faith in me carried me through many dark times back then. You and Nancy were always so kind to my son and me, far more than you ever needed to be. We have managed to get together a few times since I left; it is

never enough time. I cannot think back to my time at Stockton and not feel anew how much you mean to me and how much I care for you. Words are insufficient; I choke on them and tears. Once again, I love you Sparky.

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Elizabeth Miller

Dear Dr. Tompkins,
Thank you for instilling in me the love of Literature and especially Shakespeare. I remember we would try to stump you by giving you a random quote from Shakespeare and you could tell us the play, act, scene, line, etc. without blinking an eye. You are a phenomenon!!!! Another fond memory is when you referred to us as your “Whining and sniveling college students.” Having worked with college students for the past 22 years I understand completely what you were talking about!!!! I wish you all the best in your retirement and I hope you have some fun things planned for your free time!!!!

Best Wishes Always,

Julia Onnembo
Class of 85

I graduated a loooooong time ago (LITT '81). This is my memory: Ken scared me. He had a beard.

Beth (Pellington) Burke

It's been so long that I can't remember exactly which was the first class I took with Ken Tompkins. I do know it was in the Fall of 1977, fall semester of my sophomore year at Stockton. The class was *Survey of British Literature* – or was it *The Literary Tradition*? While the exact details are fuzzy now, the impression Ken Tompkins made remains crystal clear in my memory. Dynamic, intense, and fully engaged in his subject matter, I had never seen a teacher more passionate about his work than Ken – especially when it came to Chaucer. I can still remember the gleeful expression on his face when reading aloud from *The Canterbury Tales*. When I traveled through northern Spain en route to Santiago de Compostela in the spring of 2009, I thought about those medieval pilgrims Ken had so dramatically embodied each time I saw a pilgrim heading toward the cathedral in Santiago that houses the body of St. James. Ken truly inspired my love of literature – he not only brought the stories to life, he knew so much of the story behind the story that it was like getting two lessons in one! Ken is the rare teacher that one never forgets. For all he taught me, I remain forever grateful.

Nicole Pensiero
Class of 1980

Just a quick note about Ken. I took only one class with him back in the 80s – his Shakespeare. He was the best Lear I have ever seen, based only on the few short excerpts he read to the class, and I saw Michael Redgrave do Lear in Stratford! He brought such a haunted quality to this battered and beleaguered father. I'll never forget him!

Wendy Barker Perkins
Class of 1985

I walked into Ken's class on Shakespeare 29 years ago with trepidation. I was a woman of fifty some years who was working her way to a coveted degree in literature but with no experience with "the bard" except for seeing Hamlet on Broadway and a movie or two.

What a great journey the class took with Ken! We studied and understood and learned to love Shakespeare's greatest plays under his guidance. Not only the essence of comedy and tragedy and the magic of words but the background of play writing from Greek culture. I was able to return to work after my classes at Stockton renewed and more able to tackle daily problems.

Thank you, Ken,

Ruth Raphael
Class of 1980

P. S. I kept my notes on your class and just reviewed them. I only wish I could take your course on Shakespeare again.

Ken's spirited teaching helped equip me with the skills to write creative grants, which in turn has allowed me to secure more than one million dollars in support for emerging visual artists over the last eight years. Ken, the over 500 artists my small non-profit arts organization in DC has presented since 2002 share their thanks for your encouragement of me, and I do too!

Best,

Victoria Reis
Class of 1992

As Ken Tompkins rides his motorcycle into the sunset, it's very tough to single out one specific memory to encapsulate how it felt to be a student of his. From "Major Authors: Chaucer" to our Senior Seminar of Shakespeare's Sonnets (alliterate much?), I always looked up to Ken and valued his opinion. This isn't to say that we agreed on very much, mind you. Some of the most thoughtful and enlightening discussions I've had at Stockton (or anywhere else, for that matter) were arguing the presence of a linear narrative voice through Shakespeare's Sonnets. I was convinced that the collection told a story – Ken was not so sure. I seem to remember feeling a bit guilty for dominating our class discussions by constantly challenging his reading of specific sonnets, but looking back I know that I shouldn't have. After all, a mind is a fire to be kindled, not a vessel to be filled – and a 35 minute debate about the meaning of the word "deeds" certainly did get a bit heated at times. Dr. Tompkins was never satisfied to fill my mind with information just for the sake of me regurgitating it back to him on a test paper – in fact, none of my LITT/LANG professors were. With Ken, I was always allowed to have my own opinions, I was always allowed to develop and support those opinions, and I was always given the opportunity to present and explain them as clearly as I could. The only thing he wouldn't let me do is have the last word. Until now!

On a personal note: when I look back on my college-aged self, I realize that despite my outward embracing of the "dumb jock" stereotype, I always strived to disprove it in the classroom. This effort was highlighted exceptionally well in my senior seminar with Ken. Because class ended 45 minutes after my lacrosse practice started, I would always walk into his class ready to run straight to practice. With Helen Vendler's book stashed in my lacrosse bag, I'd sit down across from Ken in our circle dressed in cleats, my knee brace, and my Carolina blue gym shorts. Always quick-witted, Ken never missed an opportunity to playfully kid with me about the team, or my "dumb jock" persona. One day he told me in class that he drove by our practice and singled me out of the action because he noticed my "fetching" blue shorts. He told me that anybody who read Shakespeare and also pos-

sessed my smart fashion sense couldn't possibly be the "dumb jock" I masqueraded around as. It's the little things we remember that color our memories – and that's one small memory of Ken's personality that has stuck with me.

Dan Rigano.
Class of 2002

His name invoked a reverent fear from the first time I heard it, being told he was a tough professor. However, instead of fearing my *too* frequent time with him, I embraced it and learned to fall in love with William Shakespeare.

This returning, non-traditional student, who dropped out of High School to acquire a General Education Diploma, had never been educated in the powerful English poet and playwright's works in high school as so many of my surrounding peers, automatically giving me what I thought at the time would be a disadvantage in understanding one of, if not, the greatest writers of all time.

But then Tompkins walked in the room.

Spinning Shakespeare in a thousand different directions while he instructed my fellow students and me on the underlying subjects the poet so wonderfully wove together through his stanzas, Professor Tompkins provided a second chance in life to study the poet.

Thank you Professor Tompkins for not only being part of a second chance, but by sharing Shakespeare with such reverence it was as if sometimes he was present in the room, invisible in the corner watching you wake up his divine work in the minds and hearts of my fellow students and me.

You will be remembered eternally by this student.

Angela Santoriello

The Legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins

Merry meet, good friends, and welcome, too.
Our tale tonight concerns a gentleman who
Inspired terror and mirth and a cry and hue:
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

He was born with a stubble that grew to a beard.
The strangest tale you've ever heard.
His humor was known as decidedly weird:
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

At age ten he liked to give folks a fright
As he quoted, from mem'ry, scenes of *Twelfth Night*.
His beard was already a terrible sight:
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

Sometime in his schooling, he decided to teach,
The better young minds to mould and reach.
He'd force them to learn and mayhap beseech:
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

He gnashed and he growled and he made them all quiver
When scenes of *King Lear* he'd dramatic'ly deliver.
He'd vent his spleen (and sometimes his liver):
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

He taught Jonson and Chaucer and sonnets of Donne.
He'd read out the bawdies and make it seem fun,
Then he'd pull out a quiz by Attila the Hun:
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

He'd put on his full, imperious height,
Knowing freshmen would faint at the glorious sight.
He'd write "Merde!" on their papers with vicious delight:
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

And then, one sad day, it came to pass
He decided to rise above the morass
And he told academia to kiss his . . . grits:
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

As we gather to bid a fond farewell,
We hope you've enjoyed our tale to tell
About Stockton's most formidable ne'er-do-well:
The legend of Kenneth o' Tompkins.

Derri Scarlett
Class of 1982

When I first arrived at Stockton College in the Spring of 2004, I wasn't sure what major I wanted to declare. Luckily, I enrolled in Ken's *Introduction to Literature* course at 8:30 in the morning and woke up to the smell of Ken's C-cart coffee. I just *had* to have a cup of coffee from C-cart too, of course, and I just *had* to be a Litt major. Ken was the first to show me that words on a page were mysteries that needed to be unlocked to be understood. Professor Tompkins has such a passion and enthusiasm for literature and set the tone for so many students' careers at Stockton and beyond. Now, as a school librarian, I often think of what I learned in the Literature Program at Stockton and how it has changed me. I have Ken Tompkins to thank for being both my professor and preceptor during my years at Stockton, but most of all, for passing on his love for learning.

Paula Shearer

At the mature age of 12, after wandering the halls and utilizing the arcade above the N-Wing cafeteria, I made the decision to eventually attend college at Stockton. Even now, I am more proud of attaining that goal than almost any other I have made since. A lot happened between the age of 12 and those first few days I spent on campus that almost kept me from reaching that goal, but in the end I made it.

Once accepted, I eventually received a letter noting that my preceptor would be Professor Ken Tompkins. At our first meeting, as preceptor and student, I approached his office door anxiously. I knocked and was invited in to take a seat. The seat was in perfect position to see the overflowing shelves of books you'd imagine in every Literature professor's office. It was magnificent if not a little overwhelming.

The books and papers were everywhere, two computers fought for real estate on the desk, and a wall clock that looked like a watch begged for attention on the wall. There could be no office more fitting for a professor like Tompkins. In that brief first meeting, we mapped out how I'd get through the Literature program. It seemed daunting, but with his encouragement, sense of humor, and wisdom I didn't feel that overwhelmed.

In subsequent meetings as student and teacher, professor Tompkins helped me discover, among other things: My unfortunate and unrelenting bond with the comma splice, a love for Shakespeare, and how to rip any piece of writing apart to figure out what an author really means.

I graduated in late 2001 but I have not been able to break completely away from the Literature department or my wise preceptor. I came to a point in my post college career where I was stuck and I needed direction. I was in a technology job not related to my Literature degree. I did my job well but couldn't sufficiently prove I was qualified for it and therefore I was stuck on the bottom rung of a very tall ladder. That's when I started thinking about graduate school.

Since you aren't assigned a preceptor in the 'real' world I decided I'd see if I could get some advice from the only one I ever had. I contacted professor Tompkins asking whether he knew

how I could pursue my educational technology goals. To which he quickly and gladly responded, “What about the MAIT program here at Stockton?” His suggestion and encouraging words convinced me to check it out. I applied, I took the classes, and I graduated with my second degree from Stockton.

I have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for Professor Tompkins. I don’t know how preceptors are matched with students, but I got lucky when my name fell beside his. My only wish is that I could have been as great a student for him as he was a teacher and mentor to me.

Doug Skinner
Class of 2001

ARROGANT – and rightfully so. One of the VERY BEST, and he knew it! He would take us to the precipice and let go – we were on our own, and we are better for it.

With humble and sincere thanks and my kudos to the “Professor for all times.”

Marcia Sowa
Class of 1988, Class Valedictorian

Istruggle, as I often had in the past, with what to write regarding Ken Tompkins. When I first decided that I would begin taking classes and finishing what I had started years ago, I took *Literary Methodologies* with Ken Tompkins as my first class. Everyone in the class seemed afraid of him. I, on the other hand, was excited and intrigued because for the first time, in a long time, I was able to express my thoughts and ideas about literary pieces with someone who, though sometimes disagreeing, had a point they to

wanted to share.

I thought that I would pursue a degree in literature s-l-o-w-l-y and did not matriculate until I met up with Prof. Tompkins during late registration that summer where he asked, "Why are you waiting so late to register?" My reply, "I'm not matriculated so I have to wait until the last day of registration." His reply "Don't be ridiculous, you are much too old for games, please matriculate." And he turned on his heels and walked away. I had no choice, of course. I went down to registration and matriculated. He became my preceptor and the rest is history (though mostly HIS history and very seldom any of mine.)

What sticks out the most in my mind about Professor Tompkins is a conversation we had during my turn at "Shakespeare according to Tompkins." I was insulted, angry, and hurt by a note on one of my papers. He did not give me a grade and asked me where I had gotten my information. I stayed up all night crying because I could not believe he didn't understand what I had written, or worse, that he felt I had plagiarized some how. I sat through Shakespeare and then followed him into the dungeon, uh, his office. I could barely speak but mustered up enough courage to ask "Why is it I did not receive a grade on my paper?" He simply asked "May I pull up the paper?" Nodding was all I could manage. He asked again, "Where are you getting your information?" I pulled out the heavy Shakespeare anthology and showed him the foot notes, the history, the background and the pages and pages of notes I had taken from class. He said "I want to know what YOU think." I had had enough and, through my tears said "I can't write for you. I try to write what you want me to write but I simply cannot write for you. You hate me and I keep trying to write for you and I simply cannot do it anymore!" He frowned at me, grabbed hold of his moustache and his face turned red. I almost fainted. He said in his gruff, booming voice "Don't write for me. Why on earth would you write for me? That is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. Write what you think and don't apologize for it." That is how I got an A in Shakespeare. I'd earned my wings, conquered my fears, learned to feel it, write it, own it. Not sure if he agreed with what I wrote but it didn't mat-

ter any more.

Thank you Professor Tompkins. Seems you were there from the beginning to push me. You know, “wind beneath my wings” and so forth. I now know that you did not want us to write FOR YOU, but your hope was that we would push ourselves to become better than even you. I share this lesson daily with my Literature students.

Melanie Stepney

I never said much in Professor Tompkins’ classes. It wasn’t that I was shy, I was more afraid of saying the wrong thing. I was so taken aback by his knowledge and the depth at which he could interpret the literature he had chosen for us. Although I didn’t interact much in class, when he returned my essays it was as if he knew me. The comments he left on my work informed me that he believed in me more than I believed in myself; his comments helped me to strive past making an average C; and I was pleasantly surprised when I received Bs. I admired the fact that he was rooting for me. He wanted me to do my best, and he somehow knew that I wasn’t showing my best at all times. I like to think he dealt with all his students in this way, pushing them to love Literature even more than they did when they chose their major. I am ever grateful to Tompkins for leaving his red and blue marks along the sides of my essays and for leaving his mark in my life. He is one of the many reasons why I push my students to do better than what they may think is their best.

Sahkeenah Wallace
Class 2001

My KT remembrance. I hardly know where to begin when talking about Dr. Tompkins. It has been a struggle to figure out what to say. However, I began my career as a college professor this fall and these are some observations I've had over the past seven months.

When my favorite student came to class upset, I kept her after and talked out the issue. I let her cry, made her laugh, and promised to help rectify the situation, since it was an on-campus issue. I did because I saw Ken Tompkins do this over and over again. My immediate thought when faced with this situation was "what would Ken do?"

When one of my classes was being unfairly treated in some regard or another elsewhere on campus I listened to them, discussed their concerns, and then advocated in their defense. A lot of people say untenured or adjunct faculty shouldn't do that, but I'd seen Ken do it so many times when I was his student I wouldn't have been able to live with myself if I didn't defend my students.

When I taught Shakespeare for the first time, I was almost moved to tears while talking about how I had been educated in tragedy and Shakespeare. I told them all about Dr. Tompkins and what a difference he had made in my life. When students struggled with Renaissance English and relating to Shakespeare, I got them to think about it in regards to contemporary film, literature, and popular culture. I got them to relate *Othello* to their own lives in ways I had not ever imagined beforehand. That's what Ken would have done.

When faced with colleagues who have no interest in trying anything new whether pedagogically or technologically, I always think "Ken Tompkins is like 200 years older than them and if I showed this to him, he probably would have already tried it three years before." I always try new ideas, theories, and methods of teaching because that's what Ken Tompkins would do.

My goal in life is to be half as good an educator as Ken Tompkins.
All best,

William Patrick Wend
Class of 2006

I humbly offer the following old Irish blessing for the good Professor. I hope it is deemed acceptable.

May the joys of today
Be those of tomorrow
And the goblets of life
Hold no dregs of sorrow.

May God give you...
For every storm, a rainbow,
For every tear, a smile,
For every care, a promise,
And a blessing in each trial.
For every problem life sends,
A faithful friend to share,
For every sigh, a sweet song,
And an answer for each prayer.

May love and laughter light your days
and warm your heart and home.
May good and faithful friends be yours,
wherever you may roam.
May peace and plenty bless your world
with joy that long endures.
May all life's passing seasons
bring the best to you and yours!

Regards,

Bill Wetzork
Class of 1974

So sad to hear that Ken is retiring. I guess change always makes me sad. Ken certainly will be missed, and I'm sorry for all the students who won't get a chance to have him as a teacher. I only had Ken for one class, Shakespeare. I was a new/older student and on shaky ground. I remember going to his office and asking for a topic for a paper and his response was, "Why are you asking me . . . I'm not your father." His response frightened and intrigued me at the same time. I almost ran scared but stuck it out and am glad I did.

Pamela Wirstad
Class of 1991

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AND COMPLETED
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