

Tom Hearron: instructor, researcher, world traveler (continued)

by Annie Houle with Judy LaMée

Of being first in his family to go to college, Tom says, “Education transformed my life, not just economically but intellectually.” It was the most powerful experience he would ever have.

He noticed that a favorite professor went home at one p.m., and that looked like a pretty good lifestyle to the young scholar who would go on to teach 25 years at Saginaw Valley State University, Michigan, and later for 15 years at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, in North Carolina. Tom says he discovered teaching at community college was what he was meant to do. He taught Survey of American Literature and freshman writing.

Tom and his wife Patricia share a love of learning in different cultures and across continents. The pair will celebrate 50 years of marriage in October.

The book *Europe on \$5 a Day* inspired the couple’s early travel. Believing they could afford it, they went off to live in Paris for a year where Tom wrote his doctoral dissertation. They later went to Rwanda to live in a culture where they could practice their French, with Tom as a Fulbright professor. China proved the background for another chapter in their lives.

Tom has published several short stories, one based on his experience in China, *Americans Dream*. He is currently shopping around two books; he also had a story published in the online magazine *Street Light: Faces of Death XIV*, the story of a dysfunctional family in Michigan.

The self-deprecating Tom wryly says about publishing: “It’s astonishing how good you have to be to be someone you’ve never heard of.”

Tom sees OLLI as a treasure. He knew teaching here would be different from anything he had done before: there would be people who wanted to be here, but he also knew people would hold him to high standards. “Someone always knows more than you do. I don’t know everything. If others have a different perspective, that’s fine with me.” He enjoys the students, the instructors, the camaraderie. “There is joy in hanging out. Management is so efficient. Support is terrific!” Tom Hearron is clearly one of OLLI’s treasures.

Stay tuned: Kurt Vonnegut looms on the Hearron horizon.