On the Couch

WITH CONNIE KIBLER

What is your position at the GW English Department?

I am the Office Manager.

How long have you been here for, and how did you end up here?

At the risk of sounding older than water, I’ve been at GW for 40 years. I attended GW as an undergraduate from 1968 to 1972, and I started working in the English Department as a work-study student in the summer of 1969. When I graduated, I was hired as Department Secretary, which I accepted as a “temporary” job until I found something else. Five years later I was promoted to Office Manager, and I’m still here.

What do you like best about this place?

The people I work with. We have the best faculty in the University. They are friendly and funny and easy to work with. And our students, both undergraduate and especially graduate students, terrific. It’s nice working in a place where I am surrounded by smart, interesting people. I attend lectures, and I often participate in, or listen to, intellectual discussions in the hallway. And I wear sweats and shorts to work. Not many jobs are like that.
What could be improved?

The Department is better than it has ever been. I can’t think of a thing I’d change. Well, maybe we could clone our faculty and students.

What’s the most difficult situation you have encountered at GW?

A former adjunct faculty member who was suffering from Alzheimer’s showed up one day and wanted to know where his class was. He hadn’t taught with us in years. I was at a loss as to what to do. Fortunately, another faculty member who had encountered a similar situation stepped in and told him that he should come in the next day for his class. That faculty member then walked with him to his nearby residence, where he was greeted by his relieved wife. She said he had wandered off while she was in the shower.

What advice would you give current GW English grad students?

Chill out! Don’t get obsessed with your graduate studies, but enjoy them. There will be stressful times, but don’t add more pressure. Take a vacation from your graduate work from time to time. I mean put the books away and think of other things for a couple of weeks. You’ll feel better and work more productively afterwards.

What is one thing about the department that most do not know?

When I first came to GW, the English Faculty was entirely white and overwhelmingly male (I believe there was only one African American professor in the entire University). We had three tenured female faculty members, of which only one taught upper-level or graduate courses. The other two taught composition and intro literature and English as a Second Language. And the curriculum was very different then. You should come by and look at my old GW Catalogues.

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

I plan to still be here.

Are there particular thinkers/writers that most interest you?

I have a degree in French Language and Literature, so I love French authors. Proust and Flaubert are two of my favorites.
What have you read most recently?

Like most of the GW community, I am reading Edward P. Jones’s *The Known World*. And I am just starting *Petropolis* by Anya Ulinich.

Are there particular artists that you like?

I love Renoir.

A favorite movie and TV shows?

My favorite movie is “The Lion in Winter” with Katharine Hepburn and Peter O’Toole. I also love horror movies like “Halloween” and the first two “Friday the Thirteenth” movies. For TV, I watch crime/detective fiction and the old shows your grandparents watch: “Columbo,” “Murder She Wrote,” and “Matlock.”

Are you a morning lark, a night owl, or a hummingbird?

I am definitely a morning lark. Problem is I’m ready to go to bed at 9 p.m.

What is your drink of choice?

Wine.

How do you spend your free time?

I do a lot of wine tasting. It is wonderful hobby. How many hobbies are there where you can get loaded and tell people you are learning something. I also play golf.

How would you describe your driving?

Excellent. I am probably the best driver in the department—which isn’t saying much. Be careful if any faculty offers you a ride. We have some good drivers in the department, but some will raise your hair.
What do you most vividly remember from childhood?

Living on a farm for the first seven years of my life and then spending summers there for the next 10 years. I know how to milk a cow.

What's a short-term goal for you?

Finishing *The Known World*. My long-time goal is to finish *Les Miserables* in French.

What's your alter ego?

Cyndi Sweetness. If you don’t think this is my alter ego, talk with Jeffrey Cohen or any of the other chairs I have worked under. I can be cynical and mean spirited—but in a funny way (I think).

If you were granted a superpower of choice, what would it be?

The ability to turn invisible.

Who’s your biggest crush in the department?

This is the most difficult question to answer. I have to be very careful. Okay, I’ll give a hint and you decide. He is brilliant, charming, handsome, witty, and has a big ego. Maybe the graduate students should vote on who they think it is.

Please complete the following: I am governed by ...

My sense of right and wrong.

(Enter your own question here) What would people who know you be surprised to learn about you?

I love Broadway musicals and guns (but I am a big supporter of gun control laws).