Transcription of Interview with
Stephen West, professor of mathematics

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Introduction by Charmaine Tomczyk, Interviewer

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June 14, 2019 – by Charmaine Tomczyk

Hello, I’m Charmaine Tomczyk, director of the Coastal Carolina University History Project that includes interviewing individuals who have made significant contributions to the development and growth of the university.

Today it is my pleasure to interview Professor Emeritus Stephen West. He joined the Coastal faculty in 1979 to teach courses in mathematics and statistics both in the Department of Mathematics and in the Department of Computer Science. He also taught math courses for elementary education majors at Coastal. His areas of specialty in the field of mathematics include early childhood mathematics, Fibonacci sequence, and origami.

He was an adviser for several student organizations and worked with undeclared majors. He retired in 2006, but because of his love of math and his teaching talents, he continues to teach math at Coastal today as a teaching associate.

[NOTE: Transcript includes bracketed, italicized NOTE: sections by the transcriber to provide further explanations or clarifications of the transcription’s text.]

Tomczyk: Hello, Steve. Thanks for meeting with me today to talk about your time at Coastal. I want to start by asking you what it was like when you were a student here.

West: Oh gosh. Wonderful. It was. I liked it better back then then it was now. It was real calm, real peaceful.

Tomczyk: And what year was that?

West: I came here in the spring of ’66, fall of 66, spring of ‘67. So when I came here Mr. Singleton - at that time- [meaning before he earned his Ph.D.] was the Chancellor. And Ms Allen who then became Ms Prince, she was his secretary. He had an open door policy. His door was always open. You could walk in, sit down and talk to him. He was always available.
Tomczyk: As a student?

West: As a student. He was always available to any of us at any time. Of course, most of us were local kids. Now, of course we did have some who were not from here. One of the stories I love to tell. Ms. Allen – she walked up to I didn’t know this boy – she walked up to him one day and said “have you called your mama lately?” “No ma’am.” “Have you written her a letter?” “No, ma’am.” “Well she called me and she hadn’t heard from you. So you better get a hold of her really quick and in a hurry.” “Yes, ma’am; yes, ma’am.” Ms Allen was like a Mama to everybody and really Mr. Singleton was like a Daddy to everybody. It was just a wonderful atmosphere.

Tomczyk: So you could go to them even if it wasn’t an academic issue, or a course issue. If you had a problem with anything, you could stop by and see them. 

West: right: We always laughed. My name is Steve and my brother’s name is Kim and Dr. Singleton had sons Steve and Kim.

Tomczyk: Oh, that’s right. And his son Kim is named after Mr. Kimbel, William A. Kimbel who was a good friend of his..

West: The classes were small. The teachers were great. I had Ms Joyce Parker for English. Super, Super teachers.

Tomczyk: So you were a math major back then?

West: At that point, I really didn’t know. The reason I was going to college I wanted to be a naval officer like my Daddy. That’s all I ever planned for. I planned first to be..I was thinking about chemical engineering, but...

Tomczyk: And why was that, Steve?

West: I don’t know. It just sounded good /[laughter]/

Tomczyk: I wondered if you had a chemistry set as a child.

West: No, I had a biology set, a microscope. I used to dissect bugs. Math came along - picking math as my major came probably by the time I was a junior in college I decided.

Tomczyk: A little late.
West: A little late. Like I said I came here for a year and a half. Ms. Parker was my English teacher. Mrs. [Emilie] Affinito from Austria was my German teacher. She was a hoot. Uh, I loved Mrs. Affinito.

Then there was Mr. [William] Sutton. He was my Chemistry teacher. Now he taught at Francis Marion in the morning and he drove over here to teach in the afternoon. You could hear him winding that little car of his coming down 544 and making that curve there where the football stadium is, come flying in to get here in time for class. And unfortunately, we were not really the greatest behaved children. Me and another one of my friends, we would crawl out on the little roof that goes into the Singleton building. We would be out on top of that, waiting on him to come because the science classroom was right there and Dr. Singleton would come and say, “Now boys, please come down before you all fall.” “Yes, Dr. Singleton!” he would run us off that roof all the time. Finally, they nailed the windows shut so we couldn’t go out on there.

Tomczyk: But you sat out there so you could hear the professor pm his way coming.

West: And hoping that we wouldn’t going to hear him; he was going to be late so we wouldn’t have class.

Tomczyk: Well, I guess then those faculty were USC- Columbia or Regional Campus faculty and they shared them. I never realized that. [Francis Marion University was USC-Florence at that time, before it left the USC system; so faculty were shared between the campuses.]

West: Some of them taught, I think, at Coastal in the morning and went to Francis Marion in the afternoon and some were in Francis Marion and they came over to Coastal. Then we had Mr. [William] Kirkman was the math teacher. He was retired Air Force. He had taught at the air force academy. And you talk about a stickler. He come in. He shaved his head and he’d come in with a cigar. [laughter]

Tomczyk: Times have changed.

West: Times have changed. He was very demanding; a great professor, a great teacher. He timed his tests. He passed them out. He said, “When I tell you to stop, you stop. You don’t start until I say to start.” One of the boys, who is a local lawyer here in town - I won’t mention his name - he wrote his name on his test
after Mr. Kirkman said “Put your pencils down.” He wouldn’t accept his test. He said, “You took longer than anybody else; that’s cheating.” And so..

**Tomczyk:** That’s pretty stringent.

**West:** Yes, it was. But he .. once you knew what he meant, he meant what he said and you did what he said. So the preparation I got here at Coastal really prepared me for Columbia when I went to South Carolina. Everything was a breeze after that.

**Tomczyk:** So you transferred from Coastal to Columbia after two years.

**West:** After a year and a half.

**Tomczyk:** A year and a half. And all your credits transferred because we were USC.

**West:** because we were USC. We were USC-Coastal Carolina. I guess we were considered a junior college since we were only two years at the time.

**Tomczyk:** So continue this timeline. So now, you are in Columbia deciding finally in your junior year to take math. How different was that?

**West:** It really wasn’t too different. While I was on campus, I meant a graduate student named Joe Cicero. I was having trouble in a math class and he tutored me. I got to know Joe real well. I’d go over to his house; him and his family, all of these little children. He had two girls and a boy. I did my math and he helped me quite a bit. I had wanted to go into ROTC program at South Carolina but they told me just go ahead and wait until I graduated. See I still had Navy on the brain I was gonna be...

**Tomczyk:** Uh-huh. An officer.

**West:** Right. And math was the easiest way to get me degree because I love math. To me it’s so God. I mean, you know, why number work.

**Tomczyk:** Fascinating.

**West:** It is. It’s fascinating. When you look at the numbers in nature, how they revolve around many, like the Golden Ratio. Just super.

**Tomczyk:** What is the Golden ratio? Give me a quick lesson, Professor West.
West: If you use the Fibonacci sequence of numbers, you start with one and one. This guy Leonardo… Fibonacci, he’s a little Italian boy, [Leonardo Fibonacci’s real name was fillius bonacci and his nickname was a contraction of both. He is also known as Leonardo bonnacci.] One plus one is two. One plus two is three. Two plus three is five and if you divide the smaller into the larger in the sequence, every one, it oscillates about a number 1.6 blah blah blah on out and it comes in.

You find that ratio in pinecones. The spirals that go one way and then the other. Pineapples, sunflowers, daisies, From these numbers you can develop the logarithmic spiral which is the chambered nautilus. If you look at the top of a shell look down, it’s a perfect logarithmic spiral that these snails built. So when I look at math, I see God.

Tomczyk: Really. It is such a unique system.

West: It is. It’s a language that ties everything. You can model anything that happens in the universe with this mathematics.

Tomczyk: So, did this epiphany of sorts come to you when you were a junior? and you said yes, now I want math.

West: Oh no. I just thought math was the quickest way out of college and the quickest way to get into the Navy. It wasn’t until I really starting studying and looking at it that these things really popped out at me.

Tomczyk: So you graduated from USC and then what did you do after that?

West: I went to work at Tennessee Eastman Corporation and then it was during...

Tomczyk: And what do they do?

West: They make plastics and chemicals and cigarette .. what is it, it was tow [cellulose acetate tow – fibers made from plastic] for the filters of the cigarettes. Cigarette filters. Material for that.

Tomczyk: Was that in South Carolina?

West: No, this was up in Tennessee. - Kingsport, Tennessee. So I went up there.

Tomczyk: Did you actually apply for that job?
West: Yes, I did. It was working with computers. Because I was a math major, they said since you were a math major. Because computer science was not…

Tomczyk: It wasn’t around then, was it?

West: No, it really wasn’t around then.

Tomczyk: I’m shocked because computers. What year was this?


Tomczyk: So this company was kind of a trailblazer in having computers.

West: Back then you graduated… because I was a semester behind, I graduated in January of ‘70. Now we graduate in December. Back then you graduated, you had to come back after Christmas and take your exams and then graduate in January. So I graduated in January and I got this job in July, I mean in … whatever month it was - in the spring, right out of school. Went up there. Could not stand it; didn’t like the area, didn’t like the job. Stuck in a cubicle.

Tomczyk: No, I can’t see you stuck in a cubicle, Steve.

West: No, I didn’t like being stuck in a cubicle. I can run my mouth too much. You see I used to have a speech impediment when I was a child.

Tomczyk: I’d never have known that.

West: I still have it depending on if I get real nervous or whatever. Not yet, I’m not real nervous yet on screen.

Tomczyk: So did you get training for that? Did you go to a speech therapist?

West: Yes, in fact I went to a speech therapist over here in Conway because I had applied to the Air Force Academy and the Naval Academy and they had to - she had to tell them that I was fit in order to go into the military so if I had to give orders I could. I passed with flying colors. So, I got up there. I didn’t like the job so I quit. Then I heard this [knocks on the armchair] Uncle Sam calling, cause this was during...

Tomczyk: The Vietnam War.
West: The Vietnam War.

Tomczyk: And that was a draft.

West: Right.

Tomczyk: So your number was early.

West: My number was early, but when I came home I needed something to do.

Tomczyk: so wait we just missed a few years here maybe. Did you go to the Vietnam War?

West: No. I did not. I started teaching school in North Myrtle Beach high school. I swore I would never going to be a schoolteacher. Larry Biddle. When I graduated from Coastal Larry said Steve why don’t you come to Coastal and teach over here?

Tomczyk: That was high praise because Larry was very astute in identifying faculty.

West: I said, “Larry I’m not going to be a teacher. My Mama and Daddy were both taught. You will never catch me in a classroom. Never catch me in a classroom. I will never do that.” Then Uncle Sam said, “Well, okay.” I got into the Air Force Reserve and I became an operating room technician in the Air Force Reserve.

Tomczyk: Computers again.

West: No. Uh-Uh. No, I passed the instruments to the surgeon.

Tomczyk: Oh, operate like medical operate. I’m thinking operations like technical.

West: Blood and everything else. Once I got in, I thought, this is my ticket in. You see at the time all they wanted were pilots and navigators and . I had ruined my eyes those last two semesters in college. Then I wanted to go into ROTC and they said “no way.” Well, all they wanted was pilots and navigators and I wore glasses. So I didn’t quality to go in.

Now, the Army and Marine Corps wanted me. I’d been raised around too many Marines; I want to be in the Navy. No, I don’t want to be a Marine. Those guys are nuts. I love the Marine Corps, don’t get me wrong. They are fantastic.
Tomczyk: They are the first to be called.

West: They are. I said I’m not tough enough to be a Marine. Navy and Air Force we called ourselves bus drivers because we wear those nice blue uniforms.

I tried to talk them into letting me go to OTS [Officers’ Training School] once I was in the Reserves – just let me become an officer and get bars on my shoulders instead of bars on my sleeves. But that didn’t work.

Tomczyk: So what happened in the operating room? How long did you do that?

West: Well, I had already taught like half a semester at the high school And then when I went in I had to go through six weeks of basic training and then go to school and that was mainly it - going through school and that took through Christmas. So then I was ready to go back to teaching in the spring. Then I operated two weeks every summer. Go in and operate.

Tomczyk: How long did you do that?

West: Well I did that for my time – six years – with the Reserves.

Tomczyk: 6 years – wow.

West: I had quite some experiences in the operating room You know that I have a mouth. You know with the story I told you about Dr. Ingle. I was trying to close up, count sponges for a surgery we were doing. The doctor who was a Major in the Air Force. I have one stripe on my sleeve. He starts yelling. I said, “I’m trying to count your sponges, doctor.” [He said], “I want the blanky, blank sutures now!” I said, “Look, bucko” Can you imagine one strip calling a Major bucko?

Tomczyk: You were a young whippersnapper, weren’t you?

West: I was full of it. About that time I said “Look bucko, if you want to do this surgery by yourself, you’re more than welcome to because I’m willing to walk out right now.” About that time, my operating supervisor, Major Glasberg, she came up and popped me in the back of the head and said, “Airman, shut your mouth.” “Yes, Ma’am.” And then she went over. I said “Aw, I’m in trouble now”. She went around the operating room table and got up in that doctor’s ear and chewed him up one side and down the other, “Don’t you ever talk to my airman like that again.”

Tomczyk: She took care of business for both of you.
West: She took care of business for both of us. And she said you handled that a little bit inappropriately, Steve. I said “Yes, ma’am.”

Tomczyk: These are all life lessons, I feel, that kind of helped you along in your career.

West: Yes, ma’am.

Tomczyk: So now you’re in North Myrtle Beach high school teaching math.

West: I also need to tell you. Once day our German teacher got sick. The German High School teacher. And since I was the only one on the faculty that had had German in college.

Tomczyk: Wunderbar!

West; Yah. Sprechen sie deutsch? That’s about all I remember now. And I’m trying to teach these young people German.

Tomczyk: So did you teach German and math simultaneously?

West; Yes, German and Math. That was quite a bit. You know I love teaching math and I coached football and baseball and tennis in high school.

Tomczyk: All of those things. I know high school teachers do a lot more outside of the classroom

West: Well when I first started teaching high school, I made $5,000 a year.

Tomczyk: and this would have been in the late 60s?

West: 70s.

Tomczyk: Early 70s

West: Well, I qualified for food stamps but because I was a state employee, I could not get food stamps.

Tomczyk: Oh really?

West: Really. Now if my wife and I could have got pregnant and had twins really quick, I could have made $5,600 a year not working.
Tomczyk: How do you figure that?

West: It would have been on the federal government. If I didn’t work, I could get $5,600 by sitting there doing nothing.

Tomczyk: with two children?

West: with two children. But I chose to keep working. We’ve already had two children.

Tomczyk: Well, you did the math. And made the right decision sounds like to me.

West: But then I started, I don’t know if I want to teach or not.

Tomczyk: You were just getting tired, I guess, of all that work. Six years in the high school?

West: Nine.

Tomczyk: Nine years in the high school.

West: Well I’m a believer. Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. And I was sitting in the church one day and I was trying my best to find a job that I could make more money to support my wife and children than teaching school. But every door I tried to go out, the Lord slammed in my face. I finally realized.

I always thought I had been called to the ministry, also. But I had been as a teacher. Because when I first started teaching, I was a youth minister of our church. I could talk to them about the Lord. I was the coach that prayed. So it opened up a ministry for me that I could reach more people than being in a church and having a church congregation.

My congregation was changing every year. And then when I came to Coastal it was changing every semester. So I was able to talk to children about the Lord when they were having problems. But then a quiet was put on that later at the university.

Tomczyk: But your religious track really wasn’t a source of income for you, was it?

West: No, no it wasn’t.
Tomczyk: It obviously helped you in so many ways, but it didn’t solve your issue of supporting a family.

West: Right.

Tomczyk: So after nine years in high school, you mentioned Larry Biddle. Is he the one that approached you?

West: Well, nine-years, my mother-in-law said, “You know Beth’s lived were you lived all these years, you need to live where she wants to live.” She wanted us to move back to my wife’s hometown.

Tomczyk: Which is where?

West: Eden, North Carolina. So, I went up there and applied for some jobs. I didn’t want to work in industry.

Tomczyk: You had already done that.

West: I had already done that. Didn’t like it. They were looking for a football coach and a math teacher at her former high school. So I applied. I said I’ve coached football and I’ve taught math. Instead of hiring a math teacher to coach football, they hired a football coach to teach math. But during this time somebody had told me that Joe Cicero was here at Coastal. I did not know that Joe was at Coastal.

Tomczyk: Your old tutor from USC.

West: My old tutor from USC. And I called him and asked Joe, “Is there anything at Coastal?” “As a matter of fact there is, Steve. We are trying to get a position for the developmental math program but you’re going to have to wait until the State funds it. I don’t know if it’s going to get funded or not.”

Tomczyk: Because at that time, we could teach remedial math at this level. Later I think the State required that any developmental courses had to be taught at the tech schools and the two years, but early on, we did teach those.

West: Right. So I went to my principal and told him. He kept saying, “You got to sign your contract. You got to sign your contract”. I said “Can you give me a couple of weeks.” [He said] “I want to know now.”
“Well, I am going to put my money where my faith is,” I said “I quit.” I said, “The Lord will take care of me.” My principal said, “You are going to quit with a wife and two children?” I said “Yeh” He said, “How can you do that?” I said “I have faith.” Well, Next thing I know, Joe called and said the position is open. Would you like to come interview for it? I talked to Joe, I talked to Larry Biddle and I talked to Mr. Singleton. At that point, he [Singleton] hadn’t gotten his doctorate degree.

Tomczyk: So you came on campus for an interview with those individuals.

West: Right.

Tomczyk: And what was that like when you came to campus now as a potential faculty member?

West: I was very at ease because of Joe. He was such a wonderful man. Joe Cicero. Like I told you before we started talking, I wish I knew a tenth of what that man forgot. He had been a Navy pilot, Ph.D. in math. He could talk to you on any subject – it didn’t matter what subject it was. He could talk to you on a very intelligent level. Way above what I could do.

Tomczyk: He was Department Chair for many years.

West: Right. Uh-huh. He was. Because when I first started like I told you, we were the Department of Math and Computer Science which was later broke apart. I wished we were still together because I think it would help with the research that folks do being together because they fit like two hands together. They really do.

Tomczyk: Of course. So after your interview, did you leave campus that day knowing that you had the job?

West: No. I had to wait. They didn’t tell me right away but then it wasn’t but a day or two and they called me and Joe said “You have the job.”

When I came to work here I think I was going to make $300 more a year working here than I did teaching school. By that time in nine years my salary had grown up to around 13 or 14 [thousand dollars] something like that. I was going to make a bit more money coming over here plus I wasn’t going to have – unfortunately – the headaches that public school teachers face every day.

Tomczyk: Did you still have coaching when you were here?
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West: No, I did not.

Tomczyk: So you didn’t have all those extracurricular things that pushed into your time.

West: I did a lot of extra jobs at night. I wallpapered. I painted. I did all kinds of stuff.

Tomczyk: For pay?

West: For pay. And then fortunately in the summer, many of the faculty did not want to teach so I taught two classes every summer. I mean, I taught two classes every summer session so I taught four classes a summer.

Tomczyk: So that supplemented your income nicely.

West: Right. So instead of going out and finding like teaching high school or working at a motel...

Tomczyk: which many faculty did.

West: Which many did. And I even worked in a grocery store bagging groceries for a few years during the summer while I was here, before this full time summer school came about which I didn’t mind. I love the teaching – the longer I was in it. I love the teaching part. I don’t love all the … I don’t love giving tests. I wished students would just want to learn it and would study. But unfortunately you’ve got to give tests to make sure that they do study.

Tomczyk: And not all the students love math as much as you do. It’s very hard.


Tomczyk: You still hear that today?

West: I still hear that today. Even from people that are older – not in school. You know you walk into a classroom and most of them look like, like lambs lead to the slaughter. “Oh no, he’s gonna cut me; he’s gonna cut my head off. “

Tomczyk: It really is a stigma about math. I think kids get it early on.
West: And I think a lot of it like now the way, like in South Carolina they try to teach math like we teach math in college - in one semester. When you took algebra one when you were in school, you had it over the entire year. Now they try to teach algebra one in three months, one semester.

Tomczyk: And you’re saying it can’t be done?

West: You cannot. Their minds are not developed enough at that age.

Now, there are some children. I had a 13 year old that went to college with me. Detreville. He sat over there by himself. He was this brilliant little guy. I can remember Dr. Eckels would make a mistake “Alright Detreville, what did I do wrong?” “Well, Dr Eckels this is where you went wrong” and he’d erase it. He’d stretch way up with that little ol’ 13 year old writing up on the board.

Tomczyk: A genius.

West: He was. He made all of us feel like mental midgets.

Tomczyk: But he also challenged you too I bet.

West: Oh he did. If that little kid could do it, we could do it.

Tomczyk: So the teaching part standing in the classroom and talking about numbers and what they need to know and not the testing not the exams.

West: And you know in college, unfortunately, I say unfortunately, you got to publish, you got to go to meetings, you got to do this, you got to do that. You have to jump through all these hoops. I just like the classroom. I love the education. And to me, Coastal has always been known for its teachers. We’ve had great teachers here over the years. I think that’s still why we are doing so well at the university. Not only do we have good researchers, but we’ve got good teachers.

Tomczyk: Do you think over the years that you taught those students that there’s been a change in the student? Are they coming more prepared?

West: No, they are not. And I think that’s the reason. I’ll give you an example. My granddaughter. I helped her this past semester with her pre-calculus class in high school. She took Algebra two first semester sophomore year. She took her calculus second semester her junior year. So for twelve months she had no math. If you
don’t use it, you lose it, especially with math, you’ve got to constantly be challenged every day and since they try to teach this in 90 minutes.

Now I know teaching. My classes are 75 minutes. I can’t teach for 75 minutes. I’ve got to do other things in that 75 minutes. Unfortunately, they have a quiz every day in class. I try not to teach more than 50 minutes a day.

**Tomczyk:** Because you think, they will lose the connection.

**West:** Right. They lose the interest. They get “fanny fatigue” They are sitting there and thinking, “Is he ever going to be quiet?” Unfortunately, after a while you start tuning people out and if you don’t like it to start with…

**Tomczyk:** It comes quickly.

**West:** It does. It comes real quickly. They don’t want to pay attention to what you are doing.

**Tomczyk:** I guess I never really thought it through but with math – it’s one of those subjects you have to lecture. There is class participation, but basically it’s lecturing. You are at the front of the classroom with the white board, chalk board, whatever.

**West:** Well, I’m old school. You teach a subject. They come back the next class period and they ask you questions over their homework. You answer whatever questions they have. You answer whatever questions they have. Then you teach new material Back and forth, back and forth. Or if they have a question from a couple of days ago. See, that’s the way it used to be when I first started, but now because there are so many sections of the different classes, everybody is supposed to be on the same page on the same day. Tests are given at the same time. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of time because of the information you have to go over, that they can answer questions.

When I taught, at one point, I was teaching the Math for elementary ed [education] majors and that was such a joy because I would have these children... I know they are young adults, but they are still children. I am an old man. Santa Claus knows what he’s talking about.

**Tomczyk:** It’s all relative.
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West: Right. I would have them for 201 then I’d have them for 202 and at one point we had 203.

Tomczyk: And that was the required sequence for those education majors.

West: Right. For those education majors.

Tomczyk: and you pretty much taught that exclusively.

West: Right.

Tomczyk: There wasn’t another faculty member.

West: Deborah helped.

Tomczyk: Deborah Vrooman

West: Right. Dr. Vrooman. We predominately did that and then I also did the developmental math, the Math 130 once we went to that. By the time I got them, the ones for that third semester, they knew me, I knew them. They knew when we could have fun in class. But then when I said “OK It’s time to get busy”, they knew it was time to get busy.

Tomczyk: Just like that military officer.

West: Right. You know I come in the first day of class and a lot of them think I’m a drill sergeant. I said, “This is acceptable behavior in my class; this is not acceptable behavior and if you don’t want to abide by my rules, there are a lot of other math teachers in this department. Feel free to drop. You will not hurt my feelings. And go take one of their classes.”

Tomczyk: I bet not too many dropped though.

West: No, they don’t. So going back to Joe, that’s what I really came for was the developmental math. Deborah was at the forefront of this. We won an award as an innovative program with our Math 99 and Math 100.

Tomczyk: An award from where?

West: I forget where it was from.

Tomczyk: Was it a national award?
West: Yes, it was a national award that we won. Because we started out having a math lab, also where kids could come and get help outside of class.

Tomczyk: There wasn’t one before that?

West: There wasn’t one before that.

Tomczyk: Wow, and now of course we have it all the time. It’s expected. So you started that. Were you also staffing the math lab? Or teaching students to?

West: We had students who did it but Deborah and I would go in and help on occasion.

Tomczyk: So you did have not just the classes but responsibilities outside of the classroom as well. I’m going to shift gears just a little bit. I know you also did a lot of work on committees on campus. Do you remember some of those? Because I know you don’t get involved with those now; you don’t need to.

West: One was…I was on the big P&T [Promotion and tenure] committee.

Tomczyk: the University wide one. [NOTE: versus the college P&T committee]

West: You see, I’m a dead breed on Coastal’s campus. I was; I think Claudia Cleary and I were the last two people that had master’s degrees who had become tenured and had become assistant professors.

Tomczyk: I think there were a few others, but you are right, there were a handful of the because the culture was changing with the Ph.D. required.

West: So I was a dead breed, so once I got tenured and promoted to assistant professor I was put on this university wide P&T committee. That was fun. It was challenging.

Tomczyk: Hard work.

West: It was hard work.

Tomczyk: Tough decisions, tough recommendations to make.

West: Right. I was on the Calendar Committee. That wasn’t too awfully rough.

Tomczyk: Well, with your math skills, I’m sure you worked it out just right.
**West:** There were only 365 days, I ought to be able to figure that out. Of course, my toes and fingers and take my shoes off to help me count.

**Tomczyk:** I know how much you loved students, and students loved you as well. Were there student activities outside of the classroom that you were involved in?

**West:** I was involved in what used to be called the Baptist Student Union.

**Tomczyk:** Don’t we still have that on campus?

**West:** It’s not called that Student Union anymore, it’s called something else now. [BCM – Baptist Collegiate Ministry] I met the young man who mans it. He has an office over at the Waccamaw Baptist Association. He comes over here to Coastal and to Tech.

**Tomczyk:** It must have been a pretty big group.

**West:** We had a real good size group.

**Tomczyk:** You probably did things like fundraising, community work?

**West:** Well, back then, no we didn’t, we just got together and met. If kids had problems, I would talk with him. Then they got another young man; I forgot his name. At one point it was just a group of college kids, but there wasn’t really an adult leader to it. I guess since I was their adult advisor, I was the adult leader.

**Tomczyk:** So the students came to you asking you to help get involved in that?

**West:** Right.

**Tomczyk:** That’s great. Another dedicated group.

**West:** Yes, and it helped me there again with my ministry. Helping these young people because I had been a youth minister, and then I was also minister of education at another church that I went to - a non-paid positon - that I enjoyed.

**Tomczyk:** Do you currently hold a position within a ministry?

**West:** Well, I am a deacon at my church now. I had a church in North Carolina for about six years that I was pastor of. Then when everything went. The economy went really bad in the early part of 2000. Most of my congregation moved away in
order to find another job. Now I just do supply work. I teach Sunday school and I’m a deacon at my church. I just applied the other day to preach. I preach every time I get a chance.

**Tomczyk:** That’s great. As you said earlier, it’s another form of teaching. It is teaching.

**West:** It is.

**Tomczyk:** When you came here as a faculty member, it was a small group. I know you mentioned Dr. Cicero and there probably weren’t that many more people in the math and computer science department. How did you all get along?

**West:** Oh, we got along famously. Gene Collins, Deborah Vrooman, Mr. Cole, Al Cannon.

**Tomczyk:** Walt Stanaland.

**West:** Yes, he came. Oh, he was a brilliant man. He unfortunately got sick and kind of did what Jim – what we talked about – what happened to him. *[NOTE: Jim Michie, CCU archaeologist, had Alzheimer’s disease]* He got that dreaded disease.

**Tomczyk:** Alzheimer’s

**West:** Alzheimer’s. Brilliant man. I used to always use him in an example. Kids would ask about equations. Well, where did they come from? Like, Dr. Stanaland he studied tides. When he goes down to the beach, nobody has written this equation in the sand. The Lord has to help him figure that out. What it’s doing. How to write it mathematically, what it’s doing.

**Tomczyk:** Now, I know how the students kept attention to you with your examples.

**West:** Oh gosh, yes. Mercy.

**Tomczyk:** What else do you remember about Coastal in the early days because we grew so quickly. Were there some things in particular that you recall really changed? Really made a difference?
INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN WEST

West: At first when we started growing, I didn’t think we had the infrastructure we needed to grow as rapidly as we did. We were having more young people here and the classes were bigger.

Tomczyk: and when you say infrastructure, you mean. buildings?

West: No, the faculty, the number of faculty we needed. The support staff to support the growth. That’s one thing I hope now as we continue to grow that we continue to have the infrastructure; the faculty here, the support staff and all in order for students to get a good education Where there’s plenty of things on campus where they can get the help that they need.

Like right now in the math department we have what’s called “outreach”. That is they have the Math Learning Center they can go to. I believe they still have it, the SLA lab [Structured Learning Assistance] That’s really for the math 130 students. That really caters to them. Then we have the outreach where faculty are on different areas of the campus where students can walk in any math class and ask questions from those math classes to get help. So there is help available if they want it to help them with their math courses.

Tomczyk: and those support services are really needed.

West: They really are, cause I know when I was in school there was nothing there. If your professor didn’t have good office hours, you were up the creek. You had to figure it out on your own or find somebody older than you that had already had the course who could maybe help you and was willing to help you.

Tomczyk: Exactly. When you were going to school, did you also work part time?

West: No, I was fortunate. Mom and Dad..

Tomczyk: Because a lot of our students as you know do work part time and have very busy lives and families. That extra help is so important to them. They really have to carve out time to get that extra help.

West: I kind of tease the students. When I came to Coastal, the tuition was either $215 or $315 a semester. I just saw where tuition has gone up to $11,000 and something a semester. I was going [blub,blub – twitching fingers over lips].

Both my Mom and Dad taught high school and they made nothing. I started making $5000 in 1970 so you can imagine what they were making in the 60s.
Tomczyk: It’s really sad that we don’t give the professions that really are vital to society like teachers, like firefighters and others a decent wage.

West: It’s true. We’ve lost math professors to the public sector [NOTE: perhaps he meant to say private sector] because they can make more money and you can’t blame them at all for leaving to make more money with what it costs anymore to raise a family.

Tomczyk: Well, as you look forward at Coastal and what it might look like in five years. You might still be here five years from now still teaching part-time maybe.

West: Lord willing. I’m going to ask for time off for one semester, if they will let me go for one semester. I always wanted to go to New England in the fall.

Tomczyk: Ah – there’s nothing like it. Vibrant colors.

Tomczyk: Never been to New England in the fall. I’d love to go to New England in the fall, have fall semester off. But I’d like to keep teaching as long as I can. As long as my mind is still half-way decent. [laughter]

West: Cute story. Both my daughters. My daughter Heather worked in the Computer Science department and my daughter Holly worked for the Math department. Well my daughter Heather came down one day you know when we ere both in the Wall building.

Deborah knew my kids growing up, just like I know Ava Ann [Deborah’s daughter]. We would bring them to school in the summer and they could do stuff here on campus. Deborah asked Megan, “Megan, how you doing in school?” She said “Well, I have a 4.0 right now, Dr. Vrooman.” As Megan was going out the door Deborah asked her “Well, where did you get all your brains from?” The door slammed and Deborah says the door re-opened and Heather – her name is Heather Megan but I call her Megan most of the time – Megan says “I got all my brains from my Daddy, because my Mama still has hers.”

Tomczyk: [shriek laughter]

West: Oh, another cute story. I could have killed my older daughter. She took a trig [trigonometry] class from me. I did not; it was the only one. I tried to get her to take somebody else’s class.

Tomczyk: but she wanted to be in your class.
**West:** Well, it was the only one that would fit in her schedule. So I did not make any.

**Tomczyk:** any special concessions for her…?

**West:** no concessions for her. Didn’t let people know she was my daughter whatever. One day after class she comes in, class finished. I’m standing at the little podium. She comes up and puts her arm on my back. And in this little sultry Southern voice, “Professor West, I love you and I’ll see you later tonight.” And kissed me on the side of the face. [*shaking his head*] Oh, no you didn’t, Holly.

**Tomczyk:** Did you turn red?!

**West:** Before I could get down to tell Deborah what had happened, a student had already gone down there and told her that Professor West is messing around with a coed in class.

**Tomczyk:** Fortunately, Deborah was the department chair and she knew.

**West:** Fortunately, she knew Holly. And Holly confirmed it, that she had done that. I said “You girls are trying to sabotage me.”

**Tomczyk:** Sounds like your girls inherited a little bit more than just brains.

**West:** Yes, they did. You know the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. And my son even worse than the two of them. He is a firefighter in North Myrtle Beach.

**Tomczyk:** Wow. And where are they age wise. Who is the oldest?

**West:** Holly. Holly is the oldest. She is at Waterway Elementary. She is the attendance clerk there. She got her degree from here in Interdisciplinary Studies with I guess a major in Christian ministry. Heather Megan graduated from here with a drama degree. Dr. Rice wrote her a real good letter of recommendation.

**Tomczyk:** Nelljean Rice?

**West:** No, Paul Rice. Oh, Paul loved Heather, Heather loved Paul. She went to Duke Divinity. After she went to her first church, she said, “Daddy I can serve Jesus for free. I’m not going to work in a church. I have too many bosses.” She now has a very thriving bakery.
Tomczyk: That she owns?

West: That she owns in James Island, SC.

Tomczyk: Wonderful!

West: My son, he is smart as a whip, but he sees no need for a liberal arts education. He said, “I want to study science. I don’t care about history I don’t care about English.” I said, “Unfortunately son you have to take… “Well I don’t want to.”

Tomczyk: Well, Einstein was the same way, you know. He was a poor student in English and other arts.

West: He said “you’re just wasting your money sending me to school.” So he went to Tech for a year and then he found fire science. He has his associate degree in fire science. A straight A student in fire science. He got that from Kaiser University out of Florida. He’s looking to find if there is anywhere around where he can get a bachelors’ in fire science.

Tomczyk: He ought to contact the SC Commission on Higher Education because they do have as you know a [Academic] Common Market program where he may be able to pay in state tuition at another school at another state. Because, I know fire safety and that sort of thing was a big important major that they wanted to be sure we had enough professionals.

West: He loves being a fireman. I don’t’ know why anyone would want to run into a burning building. He does not mind at all.

Tomczyk: Thank heaven there are people like him. I know you worry about him with that kind of profession as well.

Let’s talk about the challenges going forward, with Coastal. You’ve been here a long time, you’ve seen us weather a lot of challenges. But going forward, what kind of challenges do you think Coastal might face?

West: I think the biggest one, like I said before, is to have the necessary infrastructure that we keep the faculty here, the buildings here. Opening up the degrees we need to have.

Tomczyk: You mean adding some more?
West: Adding more degrees to what we already have. I think it’s fantastic that we graduated our first Ph.D. candidate here. Now we’ve got another Ph.D. Don’t we have one in education now?

Tomczyk: That’s right. It’s kind of an interdisciplinary leadership education degree. [Ph.D. in Education with focus in one of three areas offered]

West: It’s wonderful to see that. I would like to see.. I know the wetland studies and all are on the other side of the campus, I’d like to see them all brought over here.

Tomczyk: Actually they are over here now, Steve. They are in Science II now.

West: Oh, have they? Okay.

Tomczyk: And the Coastal Science Center has other support services in it. Yes, to keep all the sciences together.

West: I just think the academic part of the university all needs to be together on the same campus and not spread out. Our Football program is great. Our baseball program is great. I’m sorry we lost again. I was hoping we would go further. They did a great job.

Tomczyk: You’re talking about the baseball team.

West: The baseball team did a great job. I was kind of hoping they were going to put the stadium and all over on the other side.

Tomczyk: On East Campus, you mean?

West: On the east campus where there is more land so we would have room to spread as we build with dormitories and all on this campus.

Tomczyk: Well we own a good bit of land over on east campus and there are a lot of sport fields over there; soccer fields, tennis courts there. We have volleyball courts there.

West: That’s over there where you are.

Tomczyk: That’s right. So thank heaven that’s a good area to expand.
West: Right. And that we do have the land.

Tomczyk: Right, and that we do have the land.

West: Coastal is gobbling up anything they can gobble up anywhere close. And that’s great.

Tomczyk: Still looking for a Myrtle Beach location. We haven’t got that yet. I did want to ask you one other thing about teaching. Did you ever teach at the [Myrtle Beach] Air Force base?

West: No, I didn’t. I taught at Georgetown. When I first started, what was Nagle’s first? Steve Nagle was in charge of people going down there. I came over here to Coastal, got a car, and then drove down to Georgetown and taught two classes and then drove back and then taught my classes here on campus.

Tomczyk: Wow. I know there were a lot of faculty that did that. They tried to identify faculty that lived down there where it might be more convenient, but the fact of the matter was they had classes on campus and there was a lot of traveling going back and forth anyway.

West: I liked the fact you could take courses down there from Coastal. I had a student who lived in Little River but she wasn’t my student because she was so afraid to take my Math 201 and 202 classes that she drove from Little River, South Carolina all the way to Georgetown.

Tomczyk: To take a math class?

West: To take those two classes from Colin Young who taught down there for us, because she was so scared of that ol’ Mr. West.

Tomczyk: That military man.

West: Oh gosh yes, it still comes out in me, you know. Well like I tell my students, there is so much money involved when they walk in there when you look at 30 students the money they paid to take those classes. I’m not going to put up with their cellphones. If their cell phones ring, they are out the door. I’m not going to put up with it because they are wasting other people’s time who want to be there. So, I let them know who’s in charge and when I say what I say, you pay attention. I used to give them an option when I taught in the Singleton Building.
There are doors and there are windows you can take either exit out. Because at one point those windows opened. I almost fell out of one of those in the Singleton Building.

**Tomczyk:** How in the world did that happen?

**West:** I leaned against the wall up on the – up on in the back in the mezzanine area in the back of the Singleton building there were four classrooms up there. Well, the windows open from the floor up [gesturing from floor to ceiling].

**Tomczyk:** They are very big windows, all the way up

**West:** Well I leaned against the wall. Well one day I wasn’t watching what I was doing and [leans back to gesture a fall] thank goodness my head caught me before I fell.

**Tomczyk:** This was while you were teaching class?

**West:** Yes, ah-huh. And they all looked. So I caught myself with my head. I said “Well, that was a close one.”

**Tomczyk:** And here the students thought class might be delayed for a while.

**West:** [laughter] And I’ve had students ask me “Well Professor West, how long are you going teach?” I said “well if it’s up to me I just as soon drop dead in front of the class” “That would be kind of rough on us.” “Well I said it wouldn’t bother me at all; at least you would remember your math class from college.”

**Tomczyk:** It would be memorable. And speaking of memory, in conclusion, are there some things about Coastal you would like to talk about or some questions you expected me to ask you and I haven’t?

**West:** No, now Joyce Parker told you the story that both Joyce and I tell, but

**Tomczyk:** Which one was that?

**West:** About Santa Claus.

**Tomczyk:** Yes, well go ahead and tell it again.
West: Alright. Well, Joyce had gotten sick after she had retired. She had lost both of her feet due to an infection and she had prosthesis for both of her feet. And she was receiving an honor here at the University. And she asked me if I would escort her across the stage. Well I had played Santa Claus before here at the university and she had sat at my lap and sang to me and of course she had been my English professor while I was here at Coastal as a student.

She got up to receive the award and she said, “You know, I’ve been here so long or I’m so old that I taught Santa Claus.” So we laughed about that.

Tomczyk: I think it was a teaching award, because she won a teaching award here.

West: Yes, she was a fantastic teacher. [then whispering] Because I hated English.

Tomczyk: You didn’t like English.

West: Heaven’s no. I was a math person - math and science.

Tomczyk: Left and right brain.

West: And I forgot to mention Mr. Branham. My history…

Tomczyk: Oh, Jim Branham.

West: Ahh. He made history wonderful. You didn’t mind sitting in his class. He was a great teacher. Those people I had when I came here, I wish they were still here because they were fantastic teachers.

Tomczyk: I understood that Branham would have meetings in his own home with some of his students. Did you ever have occasion to go there?

West: I went over there. His home was in the Glade off of Highway 90 and he had ponds and he had beautiful flower gardens all over the back of his yard. He was just a fantastic person.

Tomczyk: I remember they did an article on him when he retired and he mentioned that he had planned to do gardening. There were a lot of wonderful compliments made to the landscaping he did.

West: He was really close to his students on and off campus. But one of the stories I told you about that I love was about Ron Ingle. Dr. Singleton and Ron Ingle were
the greatest presidents the university’s had. Now Dr DeCenzo has done a fantastic job. I just hate they he is retiring in a year I think.

**Tomczyk:** Yes, in another year or two.

**West:** He has done a fantastic job, but while Ron was here. The math department is not known for the way we dress. I heard Timmy [Winningham] say they were not allowed to wear shorts. A lot of the times, some of our young faculty look like they got their shirts right out of the laundry basket.

**Tomczyk:** And maybe they did.

**West:** Before they were even ironed or anything; all wrinkled. I’m the guy who wears the Carhartt overalls.

**Tomczyk:** Yes, you are notorious for that. Your blue jean overalls.

**West:** Right. I’ve had people ask me. I guarantee you my overalls cost more than your pants, which they do. But I’m known for those. Ron Ingle came by one day and I was standing out between classes in the Wall building. He had three or four other suits with him. I had no idea who they were.

**Tomczyk:** Well, he did make a habit of walking around campus and getting out of his office with his entourage, with his other executives.

**West:** He walked by me and said, he raised his eyebrow “Well, don’t we have a dress code for the faculty in this institution?” I said “Well if I made as much money as the president of this university”, I said, “I could afford a three piece suit also.” He said, “I knew better than to say anything to you”, and just kept right on walking.

**Tomczyk:** He had a sense of humor.

**West:** I know. He was a great. He was great for the university; just a great fellow to talk to. I really enjoyed him. He was an excellent choice as President for Coastal Carolina.

**Tomczyk:** And he moved from being the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs into the presidency, the first president of Coastal Carolina University.
West: And I can’t go without mentioning Eddie, Eddie Dyer. He had a great affect on this… I don’t know how to use the word affect or effect. I’m a math major. I can tell you about a polynomial. Eddie Dyer was great. I loved Eddie Dyer.

Tomczyk: He was a big influence on a lot of things that happened here at Coastal because he held so many different jobs over those years.

West: I know and at one time before Dr. DeCenzo became our president, I really wanted Eddie to be our President.

Tomczyk: Well he did have his hat in the ring. As we know historical it was very close. The story goes that both DeCenzo and Dyer had a meeting and worked it out between them. That they would create the executive vice president position that Eddie then took on that would essentially be advisor and second in command to the president, which I think was a brilliant solution to the issue.

West: Yes. To keep him involved in what was going on.

Tomczyk: Exactly. It allowed us to have the talents of both men.

West: It sure did. It sure did. Anything else? There were so many good people, you know, I had dealings with when we were small, the math and science and the nursing program we had. Dr. Milene Megel [Director of the two-year nursing program at Coastal before it moved to H-G Tech] was here. Outside of my and Deborah’s classroom, we had our offices we had in the back, the science professors we had the Wailing Wall. That’s back where we would post grades.

Tomczyk: Oh [laughing] that’s why you called it the wailing wall?!

West: Yes, that’s where we would put up grades. Students would run down [pointing and moving his finger like down a list of grades] of course you can’t do that anymore.

Tomczyk: No, given privacy issues – absolutely not. Did you actually hear some wailing some times from that wall?

West: Ooh, yes. I heard more than wailing. heard some ex...

Tomczyk: Expletives?
West: Yes, expletives. Being on campus was really great. Like I said, it was a ministry I had with a number of years that I had with the kids. And I still do today. Now you even have to watch what you say in your office because if you offend somebody. I was talking to a young girl about the Vietnam War. I told her. She was a high school student she was doing a program. Like I told her, I served during the Vietnam War but I was not in the Vietnam War.

Tomczyk: Not In-country. [a phrase made popular during the Vietnam War meaning being or taking place in a country that is the focus of activities (such as military operations) by the government of another country]

West: Not in-country. I helped work on service men that came back from the war in the operating room, helped them and I was trying to explain my role. And my sergeant had told me not to wear my uniform home at Christmas because I might be spit on and sure enough I wore my uniform home and I got spit on.

Tomczyk: Really? Here in South Carolina?

West: It was in Texas and then ugly things said when I came into South Carolina because of the War which really divided this nation. Awful, It was terrible. I was explaining this. Well, one of the professors heard some of the stuff what I was saying and she wanted to report me to Human Resources.

Tomczyk: On what basis?

West: It was offensive and what I said, it wasn’t true

Tomczyk: It was your personal story.

West: I know, but it was still offensive to her.

Tomczyk: That’s true. It’s how the receiver accepts that information. If they find it offensive, then they could argue.

West: Students would come and I prayed with students I just say, now I say let’s go outside. We’ll go outside and talk.

Tomczyk: A more private area.

West: Private and pray with them If they need to find a church, I try to help them find a church to go to. Unfortunately, they have got so many negative forces when
they are by themselves when they first leave home. Hopefully I try to give them a positive influence in their life.

**Tomczyk:** You know you bring up a great topic because I think over the years Coastal has, in my view, kind of struggled for a chaplain for the institution. You mentioned Ron Lackey and I believe he was designated the University Chaplain.

**West:** Yes he was, Ron was a wonderful fellow. I am a conservative Southern Baptist. The liberal theology, I have a problem with that. One person at one of the Honors Convocations prayed to God, our eternal father and mother. I just about died when he said our eternal mother because in my Bible, God is used with a male voice. As Christ is a male, as the Holy Spirit is a male. And that’s not trying to be chauvinistic. That’s just what the good book says. You either believe the book or you don’t believe the book.

**Tomczyk:** I think as a public institution we have always tended to walk a fine line about being ecumenical. I know that even in Dr. DeCenzo’s inauguration there were different denominations that gave blessings.

**West:** I was told when I first applied for tenure, I had put in the part that God had called me to be a schoolteacher and I was told “Well, maybe you better take that out.” I said “No, if I don’t get tenure because I put that in then …”

**Tomczyk:** then it wasn’t meant to be…

**West:** then it wasn’t meant to be. I’ll find me somewhere else to go. He is in control of my life.

**Tomczyk:** He had up to that point.

**West:** And he’s going to continue to stay in control. At one point here on campus, I know the computer science department was probably 90 percent Christian and we could talk to one another. Like when Gene Collins.. Gene Collins is a strong Christian. We would talk from office to office about the Lord, yelling at each other.

**Tomczyk:** Because you could.

**West:** You could, but now we would offend somebody.

**Tomczyk:** And you have to keep it to yourself.
West: Right. I don’t know you might want to edit this out. People don’t have a problem with the name God because they can view God as however they want to view God. But when you say the name Jesus Christ, that name to me convicts. People don’t want to hear Jesus Christ. God – uh - well whatever you want to think God is. But when you say Jesus specific as to who you are talking about and people just don’t like to hear it.

Tomczyk: Some people.

West: Some. You see when I taught computer science I used scripture when …on their test you have to take Scripture when they had to do Word Perfect.

Tomczyk: It was Word Perfect before MS Word.

West: They would have to type the Roman Road [Scriptures: a collection of verses in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans]. Or I’d tell them to change this to capital of this to bold in a way so they knew how to do all this stuff. But then the other courses I taught, they would have to tear scripture apart and then put it back together the way I told them to tear it apart.

Tomczyk: So that was the text you used.

West: That was the text I used. One of our - I don’t know what her title was - Gene Collins said “Well he has academic freedom and he can use whatever text he wants to use. It doesn’t matter that it just happens to be the Bible.” You see, that’s another thing about academic freedom. I think universities have moved away from the academic freedom that professors once had.

Tomczyk: Well the definition of it has probably changed a bit.

West: It’s very political now.

Tomczyk: Because we have different examples now in this day and age. But thank heaven America was born on religious freedom and it opens the door for everyone.

West: Well see that’s just it. I have no problem with any other faith. If it’s their faith, it’s their faith. Now I would love for them to believe in my Jesus. I’m not going to hold that against them. But I think if the country goes in the way that its going, then all faiths are going be in jeopardy because when you start focusing on one to shut it down, you’ll have to shut them all down.
Tomczyk: It’s a dangerous step to take, isn’t it?

West: It’s a slippery slope that they are on. That you don’t hear…Well, you know, like our Supreme Court used to always would open with a prayer. Our Congress would open in prayer. Now when they swear people in they won’t even use the line “So help me God” They have taken that out. In courtrooms, they have taken that out.

Tomczyk: Well I think our currency still says ‘In God we Trust.”

West: [smiles] Right. Well, I don’t know if you give Congress long enough they are liable to try to take that off the bill.

Tomczyk: and I think our Board of Trustees if I’m not mistaken still opens with a blessing.

West: Well, that’s great. Now see Subhash Saxena when he was Chair,

Tomczyk: A math colleague

West: Yes, a math colleague. Joe had left, Subhash became the Chair. Every time we had a get together. Subhash would say “Steve, would you pray over the food?” Now I said “Subhash, you know how I pray. I pray to the Father.”

Tomczyk: Because Subhash is Hindu.

West: He’s Hindu

Tomczyk: But he deferred to you.

West: He deferred to me.

Tomczyk: Sounds like you both respected each other’s perspective.

West: Right and you know I said “I pray to the Father and in the name of the Son.” He said “That’s fine. You go right ahead and do that.” He was always very, very supportive of that.

Tomczyk: It’s called religious tolerance.

West: Right. Subhash was another great, another great math professor. Once you learned to understand his dialect. That is you know he spoke British English being
from India. He would say one upon two for a fraction one half. He would say one upon two. So when you caught on, and he said one upon two, then you knew what he was talking about. Great, great teacher. I took two courses from him.

Tomczyk: And he’s still very supportive of Coastal Carolina.

West: Oh, he is. He still tries to do a lot for the university.

Tomczyk: I know there are scholarships in his name.

West: Yes, Ma’am. He does a lot with the math contest that we have here on campus.

Tomczyk: That we have had for years. When it started, was it AT&T math? We had different sponsors over the years.

West: Right. I was in charge when it first started.

Tomczyk: Really? So who was funding it then? Was it AT&T

West: GTE . We had...It kept changing.

Tomczyk: Yes, depending on who you could get funding from.

West: Yes, who you could get funding for it.

Tomczyk: It was a real coup. I think it was I don’t have evidence of this but I would suspect it was a great recruiting tool because it was high school students.

West: I tried to use it, we finally got to a point we offered a scholarship. If they were in state and they won it, and they wanted to come to Coastal and major in math, they could get a scholarship to come here and major in math. So I saw it as that. And I did that.

Then Tom O’Loughlin started helping me and then once Tom retired. I did it for years by myself.

Tomczyk: And it grew big.

West: Yes, it did and I got tired. We had schools from out of state come in. We had a school from Tennessee up in Kingsport.
Tomczyk: I remember buses coming on campus.

West: Yes. Tom helped. And then when Tom retired I said I’m done. Stick a fork in me. I said, “I’ll let one of these young professors [do it.]” You know I’m known as the dinosaur in the department.

Tomczyk: Now.

West: Now. I retired in 2002 but I still taught full time since 2002.

Tomczyk: You are the old sage in the department.

West: [laughing] Yes amongst many other things they probably call me.

Tomczyk: Well, Steve thank you so much for chatting with me today. I think, we covered a lot of ground.

West: Thank you for having me.

Tomczyk: It has really helped I think, confirm what you and many of the faculty colleagues that came here with you really contributed to Coastal what it is today – which is a great institution.

West: Well it is and I try to be Coastal’s biggest cheerleader any time I get the chance. I say, you know why? Why leave the area? And even when people say, “Well my kid wants to leave in the dorm.” I say, “They can go live in the dorm. The dorms may be 30 minutes from where you live, but they can still live on campus, be involved in campus life, learn to hopefully be an adult and grow up, but yet they are close by if you need to get to them or they need to get to you, instead of being you know like a plane trip away.”

Like one of my students was from Washington State this year. How in the world did you hear about Coastal Carolina from Washington State?

Tomczyk: Well you know we get a good number of international students, too.

West: Oh, I know I had one from Brazil one year. Oh, the international students are a dream. They are like a sponges, they just sit there and.

Tomczyk: They are well disciplined too, aren’t they?
West: They are very well disciplined and soak up everything - just so appreciative of the opportunity to learn. Where I think unfortunately American children don’t see it as a privilege to come to school. Oh, I got to go to college? You ought to want to go to college. But there again, there are some children that don’t need to go to college.

Tomczyk: Like you son, as we were talking about earlier.

West: Right. We need firemen,

Tomczyk: Absolutely we do. And tradesmen.

West: We need plumbers. We need electricians. We need auto mechanics and we need all these other professions. And guess what? They make a whole lot more money than math college professors do. Not that money is everything but the thing is…..

Gene and I were talking one time, Gene Collins and I. We don’t come to work everyday, because we don’t consider it work. I don’t consider it coming to work. I come to do something I love to do and that’s try to teach young people, because when I see that lightbulb go on. And students who thought they could not do it; all of a sudden they can do it. They are just totally amazed at what they’re producing; they never thought they could produce.

Tomczyk: That makes it all worthwhile, doesn’t it?

West: It does. Even if it’s only get one a semester, it’s great. I know I’ve run over my time.

Tomczyk: No. That’s quite alright. I am glad you are continuing to teach for all the reasons that you just explained. It’s wonderful. Thank you again, Steve.

West: Thank you, Charmaine, I appreciate it.