

## **Interview with Geoffrey Parsons on June 20, 2018 by Charmaine Tomczyk**

Hello, I am 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 Geoff Parsons who contributed to the advancement and expansion of the international programs at Coastal Carolina University and is known as Coastal's international ambassador. He gives caring attention to international students who seek his help to navigate life on an American campus and in this community. He is equally adept at leading American students on study abroad programs or arranging international exchange agreements to benefit students at Coastal and faculty alike. He also serves as a knowledgeable host to our visiting faculty scholars and professors.

Geoff contributed his time and expertise to Coastal Carolina University for 30 years, starting in 1988 as a graduate assistant and retiring as Director of International Programs in May 2018. After working in international programs for several years, he earned the position of director of international programs in 2001.

Geoff earned the CCU Professional Staff Award in 1999/2000 for his outstanding service and he earned the Outstanding CCU Alumni Award in 2007.

He has travelled extensively in his position and has earned many friendly contacts around the globe. His love of travel continues today in his retirement years as he visits Coastal graduates and former students and faculty who gleaned valuable experiential learning and life-long friendships from study abroad.

**Tomczyk:** Geoff Parsons thanks for meeting with me today to talk about Coastal and your time here.

**Parsons:** My pleasure.

**Tomczyk:** Can you tell me how you first came to Coastal and what prompted you to come to this campus?

**Parsons:** Well I came to this part of South Carolina to help with family health issues with my father and while taking care of him realized I was going to have a lot of free time. My sister who had gotten her degree here at Coastal Carolina College, Univ. of South Carolina suggested that I might want to go back to school and my mother was also taking a class every semester. So I became aware of Coastal because of them. And back then as you know, it was much, much smaller and when the Prince Building is, it was a coquina parking lot.

**Tomczyk:** What year are we talking about?

**Parsons:** This was 1987. So, I ended up coming and speaking with Sue Colvard in Admissions and Susie Beverly and the master's program that I was entering was part of University of South Carolina obviously, because we were still part of USC. Some of my coursework was here and some of my coursework was in Columbia, which was an interesting commute mostly that was Saturday coursework as I drove up there.

**Tomczyk:** So you started at Coastal as a student?

**Parsons:** Yes I did. Absolutely and I had gotten to know Paul Stanton.

**Tomczyk:** Who was Vice President for Academic Affairs?

**Parsons:** But I don't know if that's what he was that in 1988. I think he was still in the psych department. because there were psych courses I needed to take. Anyway, I met Paul. He was a wonderful man. And through Paul I met Sally. Sally, um...

**Tomczyk:** Sally Hare?

**Parsons:** Yes, of course.

**Tomczyk:** Because she was involved in graduate education with USC.

**Parsons:** Yes, and Sally Hare and Paul Stanton were friends with Steve Nagle. I had left a job in the New York area and had some funds available to help me with my tuition because I had been a full time employee for 13 years with this company.

**Tomczyk:** What did you do up there?

**Parsons:** I ended up being a business analyst. That was my last position.

**Tomczyk:** What did that entail?

**Parsons:** Well, the BOC group owned about 30 proprietary schools. Some of them were technical, some were trades. They had computer science schools, welding schools, secretarial schools, air mechanic schools; all over the United States. I had started out as director of financial aid shortly after my arrival with the company when I began working with them in 1973. That was after I left Virginia Tech. Promotions and just the passing of time had me filling other positions. I became part of the startup team that would go out throughout the United States and start up new schools, which included hiring people but also choosing fabric for furniture and such.

**Tomczyk:** So these were new buildings going up?

**Parsons:** Yes new building were going up or they were taking over existing spaces and renting them. I would hire and train people and then in the last year and a half I did less travel because they were not starting up new schools but my position evolved into a business analyst. So, I was helping with the five-year forecast and figuring out how and when these institutions might become profitable.

**Tomczyk:** In a way you worked in educational institutions.

**Parsons:** Yes, in educational administration, certainly.

**Tomczyk:** So when you came here, continuing your education seemed like a natural thing to do then?

**Parsons:** It did and when I became aware that they were looking for a graduate assistant in the international programs office. Because at that time, I don't know if you remember Bruno Gujer?

**Tomczyk:** Of course.

**Parsons:** Bruno was no longer in the position. It was Steve Nagle and he had one course release and was responsible for international programs. We were in a little trailer where the Prince Building is right now.

**Tomczyk:** I wanted to ask you how big was international programs at that time?

**Parsons:** Well, it was Steve with one course release and it was me. I was brought in to handle the study abroad component, which was with ISEP the international study exchange program I was asked by then President Dr. Ingle to take over the short term study abroad program.

**Tomczyk:** How many were there then?

**Parsons:** At that point it was only one, the Oxford Program that had been run by Bob Robinson.

**Tomczyk:** In philosophy.

**Parsons:** Yes, in philosophy. So I had been asked to take over that program. Since I had been a business analyst to come up with budgets and price out a program that was reasonably priced but where we could stay on budget.

**Tomczyk:** In England or other places?

**Parsons:** No, in England. And as it happened, I had done a study abroad program at Oxford myself in 1968 so I knew the town well and also I had done another program in Sussex University in England so I had some sense of England and so I was asked to go along to handle the finances and handle some of the excursions and activities. Because I had been and knew some of the area well enough I was able to take students on excursions and activities throughout the program to sort of help.

**Tomczyk:** So you were the one who actually travelled with them?

**Parsons:** I did.

**Tomczyk:** Were there faculty too who would go or not in the early days?

**Parsons:** In the early days yes, initially it was Richard Collin. Richard Collin went and since we were still at that point part of the University of South Carolina, we asked the professor from USC to come. George Geckle was their “Shakespearist” [*professor*] and he would come.

**Tomczyk:** Richard Collin was an Oxford graduate himself so he knew the area.

**Parsons:** He was. He graduated from Alden College at Oxford. He and George got along very well which was great. An interesting model having two faculty members but from different institutions so it created some challenges as you might know with paperwork. Dr. Geckle would bring his students as well as a few of ours. So courses would be cross-listed as a USC course but as a Coastal Carolina College course as well.

**Tomczyk:** I'm thinking not only of the academic differences but I'm thinking of just getting from Columbia to here. I mean the travel plan having to meet at the airport, the compensation...

**Parsons:** Well, we always flew out of Charlotte so that was the way we did that.

**Tomczyk:** You met there?

**Parsons:** We met there. We would have a van that would drive our students up, or sometimes two vans. We would have student drivers or staff drivers to drop everybody off, or students could get to Charlotte on their own. Then we flew from Charlotte to London. And from there the program took off and it was generally three and a half weeks.

**Tomczyk:** Three and a half weeks.

**Parsons:** Uh-huh. We would always go just before July 4<sup>th</sup> because I'm sure you know university digs in England are occupied through the month of June because the academic year ends in June. To keep the costs down, we would stay in University digs. We would arrive usually the third of July and then return home the first week of August.

**Tomczyk:** About how many students were there that first time?

**Parsons:** Probably 16 to 20.

**Tomczyk:** USC and Coastal students pretty much even?

**Parsons:** Maybe it was about 8 and 8, I think, and over the years I don't think we ever got to 30 but we were always in the upper 20s.

And Richard Collin obviously a very gifted and entertaining professor. There was really no advertising necessary. He would announce that he was doing the program. Within three weeks of

his announcing, the program was full. So, we would have a waiting list at that point. It made it very easy to do bookings and work out some logistics because you would know exactly how many people were going on the trip.

**Tomczyk:** From a student's point of view, they didn't have any special grant money or financial aid specifically for travel. These students had to come up with their own funds to go, right?

**Parsons:** And financial aid was a little more restrictive back in those days. Study abroad was funded but not to the degree it's funded nowadays because there's a better understanding now of how important it is to an undergraduate or graduate degree. So it's easier to get assistance.

**Tomczyk:** Now there are grant monies available through the Horry County Higher Education Commission, aren't there?

**Parsons:** Well, there were several. Horry County Higher Education Commission has provided us with scholarship money for anyone who is a Horry County high school grad and our colleges have also come up with money. The Edwards College has grant money as does Wall College of Business and the Science College as well.

**Tomczyk:** Specifically for study abroad?

**Parsons:** Yes, so that students can receive anywhere between \$200 and maybe \$1000 depending on funding for that particular year. So it's helpful.

**Tomczyk:** It helped to defray costs.

**Parsons:** Oh, yes. It's a wonderful thing.

**Tomczyk:** Back in the first year of so of this study abroad, students didn't have those opportunities as much?

**Parsons:** Probably not so much; everyone was pretty much self-funded.

**Tomczyk:** I make that point only because I think it's amazing that that many students were interested in going.

**Parsons:** Well, considering our enrollment back then. Yes. We were considerably smaller. But Richard Collin, you know...

**Tomczyk:** Attracted them.

**Parsons:** We, yeah, he's brilliant. It was a wonderful course. It was very heavy on content. Both George Geckle and Richard Collin had two hours of classroom time very day. Because where we stayed at Harris-Manchester College we also booked classroom space so that's where the day started and then excursions and activities followed. Many times the excursions and activities were the same for both courses because they would relate to the material being taught by either Richard as a history professor or by George teaching Shakespeare.

**Tomczyk:** So tell me how you were able to arrange the details of this trip. Obviously you talked earlier about you had the financial analysis – what would be cost-effective. But how did you come up with the itinerary?

**Parsons:** By phone. I would call. I mean there was no internet. So I would pick up the phone. We had worked with Harris-Manchester College previously so I was able to contact them and arrange booking for the next summer. And then I'd ask "Well which coach company did you use?" So they gave me the name of the coach company so I would call the coach company and say we need an airport pickup or we need a coach to take us to Stratford or to Bath or to Stonehenge or to Winchester or various and sundry places.

**Tomczyk:** And these were all places that you did actually visit?

**Parsons:** Oh, Yes. So I would arrange the coaches and we found places in London like Hughes-Perry Hall, a University of London dormitory space. So I would call them or send them a fax which is what you'd have to do and arrange a booking and back then you had to get checks because there was no wire transfer. So you would get a check and get it in foreign currency and then mail it. And then you would have to call a week or so later and say "did you get our money?" to make sure they got paid.

Once we hit the ground, I would immediately go to the underground station and buy all the subway passes because you couldn't do that online.

I had to do that with cash or with credit card and I had to do that every day because there were no passes back then in 1990.

**Tomczyk:** You were like a diplomatic courier.

**Parsons:** [smile] Well, sort of. I mean, I was carrying at times a considerable amount of money.

**Tomczyk:** Yes, for three and a half weeks.

**Parsons:** Well, I was a young guy with a fanny pack and nobody bothered me; everyone left me alone. Same thing with theater tickets; everything was done on the hoof. Very different thing back then.

**Tomczyk:** Just so that we can see the difference; today, how would that be done?

**Parsons:** Well since I did it as recently as last year. It's all online. You can buy opera tickets. You can buy admission to the Coliseum or any number of things. You just purchase them online and put them on the credit card. Same thing with airline tickets which at times becomes problematic.

Because in the old days- gosh – the old days - n the 90s - you could always find a travel ...I mean, when you booked something you got a live body on the other end of the phone. You could make a booking. Now you send an email to someone and if you're lucky they get back to you within a day but maybe not then they'd say they are working on something, but maybe they're not. You don't have the immediacy that we used to have.

**Tomczyk:** And you can't have that conversation that might tip you off to some other bargains or travel opportunities?

**Parsons:** Oh no, because particularly this past year since we were working – you'd think I'd remember - .13 to 15 programs and working on the airline tickets for at least 10 of those and logistics as well sometimes you just have to trust that the person you are turning this stuff over to is going to do what's expected. Sometimes there's snags. But fortunately, we've not had anything that could not be fixed.

We are much bigger now. It was very different. When I was a grad assistant or when I first started out in my full-time position as a coordinator, I was working with probably fewer than 30 international students and just a handful of programs. Again technology was not what it is now.

There's a lot of hands on stuff which was required in the early days. You typed up letters. You put them in envelopes. You stamped them and you waited to get something back maybe ten or fifteen days later.

The pace was so different. Now you send an email or somebody sends you an email and if you don't respond within two hours, you're getting another. So the pace was very different.

**Tomczyk:** We were talking about the Oxford program and of course, that was our students going abroad for that experience. When did Coastal start doing exchange agreements or having international student come here or having our students go to another university for a semester or yearlong?

**Parsons:** Well that was also in the 90s and I think that was initiated by Steve Nagle. That was with University College-Northampton. That's in Northampton, England. We would welcome their American Studies students here for a full academic year. They came in numbers of maybe four to eight a year. So that was a pretty successful program. And in return we would send students but not in as many numbers. Maybe one two or three.

**Tomczyk:** But still you had to find housing for those students who came here?

**Parsons:** Well, yes I had to arrange the housing I would work with housing directly. This many women this many men and we need space for them.

I will share this. We had one student. Who was really quite a challenge who came and he was blind and deaf.

**Tomczyk:** You had no knowledge of that prior to his arrival?

**Parsons:** We knew he might be coming. We had a disabilities person here. But that person was not available when he arrived. So he arrived and I met him at the airport. Because I met all of these people at the airport. I picked them up personally. I met Tony who was blind he had his ...

**Tomczyk:** cane

**Parsons:** Yes, red tipped white cane. I got him settled with a few other students because he was coming with other students. The first three days he was here, I had to walk him around campus. He never needed me after that.

I walked him to every building and talked the whole way we were going so he knew what we were passing, what we were going through so he could identify sounds and he could understand where he was. Then we walked into each building and up the stairs and down the corridors so he would know in which direction his classes were.

**Tomczyk:** And how many steps?

**Parsons:** Oh, yes, and so it took three days.

**Tomczyk:** He didn't have a student assistant after that who guided him and helped him?

**Parsons:** No. No. So he had a very successful experience. This is an aside but maybe it's not. I wake up about 3 o'clock every morning anyway and turn on the BBC. It was about three weeks ago I woke up and I turned on the BBC, and I said, "I know that voice coming from England" and it was the blind student, Tony Giles, who had been to 174 countries all by himself. He was being interviewed by a BBC reporter.

**Tomczyk:** As well he should. That's phenomenal!

**Parsons;** He has written two books. So that's how he has been able to fund his travels. So that's interesting... [See [www.tonythetraveller.com](http://www.tonythetraveller.com) ]

**Tomczyk:** He didn't let his disability stop him from exploring the world.

**Parsons:** No, I was very impressed that he came here. Three days, that was it. He made excellent grades. He was a sharp guy. Very witty, very British, sarcastic humor. So he delivered and I delivered equally. [laughter]

**Tomczyk:** I'm sure it was a challenge for both of you to keep up. He was here for a whole year?

**Parsons:** A whole year, yes. Then took off after he was done here, and traveled a bit and then took off from there to 174 countries in basically a little over twenty years. Pretty impressive.

**Tomczyk:** Very impressive. While we are on the topic, any other students who particularly come to mind who have gone on to greatness or had unusual lives after they left Coastal?

**Parsons:** Well, we had a group of students from South America, actually all Central America from Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras back in '91 or '92

**Tomczyk:** How did we get that connection?

**Parsons:** USC, remember we were still a part of USC at that time.

**Tomczyk:** Yes until '93.

**Parsons:** USC had been awarded through US AID a three-year contract – the first year was – the length I may be getting wrong – but the first year they were at the English Language School in Columbia because we did not have an English language program at that point.

**Tomczyk:** In Columbia, SC?

**Parsons:** Yes, Columbia, South Carolina. And then they were to come here for a two year program. Because up until just a few years before we had an associate degree and we were a four year institution at that point. But they wanted us to provide two years of business education and then the students would return to their home countries and use that education to advance themselves as well as their countries.

**Tomczyk:** How many students were involved with that, do you recall?

**Parsons:** I believe there were eight students who came. It was a very rough for them because they spoke no English before they arrived. They had a year's worth of English and then were expected to jump into university level work. It was very difficult. My hat went off to them because it was stressful.

**Tomczyk:** They lived together?

**Parsons:** They lived on campus. They lived over in the Woods, which is all what we had in terms of housing back in those days. They didn't have a lot of spending money because they did not come from families that had those kinds of resources.

**Tomczyk:** Did they have transportation?

**Parsons:** Well we drove them around in vans.

**Tomczyk:** When you say "we", you mean you and other staff?

**Parsons:** Do you remember Orhad Karacas a student of ours from Turkey who is CEO of Karacas Enterprises in Istanbul.

**Tomczyk:** Ah – another success story.

**Parsons:** Well, that existed before he arrived - I mean before he came here. He was very much involved in the family business. So Orhan was my driver when I wasn't driving. We would take them to Columbia, took them to Brookgreen Gardens and Charleston; and all of those sorts of day trips.

I think then they went, I think they went on a trip to Washington DC as well, because I used to, as you may recall I took a group of international students to Washington, DC.

**Tomczyk:** during Thanksgiving, traditionally for several years.

**Parsons:** More like ten. Long time Yes, so we did that every year for about ten years.

**Tomczyk:** What about the foreign language department here? Did some of their faculty enlist in this?

**Parsons;** No, not with this. They were teaching faculty so their schedules did not permit that kind of commitment. I think.

**Tomczyk:** Well, you knew Spanish.

**Parsons:** Well I knew French more than Spanish. Well I knew French, I didn't know Spanish at the time. Spanish came about because of the students from Central America. I was an active

member in NAFSA in those days. A woman who was our rep from AIFS (*American Institute for Foreign Study*). Her husband ran a Spanish language program in Costa Rica. I had run into Cathy at a NAFSA meeting. I said I knew some Spanish just off the cuff. And she said, “Oh well we have a school in Costa Rica.” So I was still a graduate assistant at that time which meant I had my summers off. So I took a month and went down on vacation and just studied intensive Spanish. But I had also already sat in some Spanish classes here. The chronology of this is getting a little confused.

**Tomczyk:** Well, it wouldn't surprise me that even though you knew you would be taking Spanish classes that you would cram a little and get a little bit ahead of it ..

**Parsons;** Well the classes helped me when I got to Costa Rica. Had I not taken the classes I would have been lost. But since I had two semesters of Spanish which I took very seriously. I found it...I am not all that shy. So I found that I was able to jump in and sort of just struggle along until I struggled less and less.

But that's also what I did with French. I had a summer off here at Coastal and decided I'd go to France because I wanted to. I'm not very good at taking vacations that don't have a project involved. So I went for five weeks to Grenoble and studied intensive French. But I had lots of French in high school and college so that was sort of something to jumpstart what language skills I had from before.

**Tomczyk:** But still it sounds like you have an aptitude for languages. It seems like the more languages you know the easier it is to kind of pick up some others?

**Parsons:** I think it is, depending on the root of the language. I am better with romance languages. I tried Arabic for about a month and that was a little hard and then work got in the way. I had three semesters of German, but my German is very weak.

**Tomczyk:** Did you have an opportunity to use your German?

**Parsons:** Only, ..., no, not really. No, no. [smile]

**Tomczyk:** We won't go into examples. We will leave it at NO.

**Parsons:** Well I can say “schwimmen sie gerne?” which is “Do you like to swim?” Or “wo ist der Tisch”, Where is the table? You can edit that.

**Tomczyk:** There’s not a lot of opportunity to use those phrases necessarily.

**Parsons:** No, and if so, people look at you oddly.

**Tomczyk:** I ask because we now have a thriving program that goes to Germany, right? Don’t we still have students who go to Germany?

**Parsons:** No very often.

**Tomczyk:** From the College of Business? We still have a program?

**Parsons:** We still have the program but it’s not really reciprocal. We don’t get a lot of students going to Germany. We maybe get one every year or so. We general have a handful that comes from Germany for a semester or a year. They do so and they pay tuition. It’s not like an exchange.

**Tomczyk:** I thought we sent our business students to Mainz?

**Parsons:** Mainz.

**Tomczyk:** and Bonn maybe?

**Parsons:** Mainz, Bonn-Rhein-Sieg; Mainz Bonn-Rhein-Sieg pretty much and Remagen We do occasionally but not in large numbers.

**Tomczyk:** OK I recall we used to have something in Japan as well.

**Parsons:** We used to have something with Tokyo Denki and now we’ve got something with Osaka.

**Tomczyk:** and lieu of?

**Parsons:** We also have another partnership with Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS). We don’t have students going there at present. But we don’t offer Japanese at present which was

the problem. When we stopped offering Japanese we ceased to have students who were able to go.

**Tomczyk:** That's the responsible thing to do. We don't want to start the program when we can't prepare them.

**Parsons:** No, and since there is supposed to be a reciprocity, we can't have students come here paying tuition at their home institution and then us not realizing any tuition revenue. So we had to stop the program.

**Tomczyk:** Tell me more about programs we have now.

**Parsons:** Well we have a good program with Exeter University in England. That's very successful. We always have students going there and students coming here.

**Tomczyk:** Is that for any major? or is it focused on a particular major?

**Parsons:** Well the students who coming here are all science majors generally biology. That was developed by Val Dunham.

**Tomczyk:** Dean of the College of Science.

**Parsons:** College of Science at the time. That's really successful. We also have a strong relationship with Deakin University in Australia which we had since I think 1992 when I had a student who wanted to go on the ISEP program. She couldn't get in because there were only two slots. She was distraught.

So I picked up the phone and called Australia. I had to stay until about 8 or 9 o'clock at night because you know the time different.

I said "We are an ISEP institution but there are no slots available. Would you be interested in starting up a program with us as an individual institution?" And they said yes. Becky was able to go to Australia. From then on we've always had students go and we had a reasonable number of students come as well. We had six students this past year which is pretty good.

**Tomczyk;** And again the majors for those students?

**Parsons:** They are all over the place. With Deakin University, it's all over the place. We also have a relationship with James Cook University in Queensland, Australia that is rather recent. That seems to be a more successful program because it's in Queensland. Queensland is close to the Great Barrier Reef and to Sydney whereas Deakin is in the south near Melbourne just sort of north of Tasmania. So it's different.

**Tomczyk:** Thanks for explaining that. My thought was that the students who would go there from Coastal would be Marine science students because of the Great Barrier Reef.

**Parsons:** And that's true. Deakin has a strong marine science program as well. The interest in the Great Barrier Reef has sort of changed the direction of students as far as where they go. Deakin is still active just not as active. And then other than that...

**Tomczyk:** Nothing in South America?

**Parsons:** Well, no. We had something with Universidad San Francisco de Quito in Quito, Ecuador with the Galapagos Islands. So we do have students going there every year. And occasionally we have a student who will go to the main campus in Quito.

We used to have something with Cuenca, Universidad de Cuenca and we don't have that any longer. That's in Cuenca, Ecuador as well. That's all we have in South America. We have nothing in Central America other than our language program, which is short-term summer stuff and that's in San Jose, Costa Rica.

**Tomczyk:** When you talk about these examples, these are exchanges?

**Parsons:** Well when we are talking about semester and academic year they are in theory exchanges. The only two that are really active exchanges are the ones - well make that three. Exeter University, Deakin University and James Cook University.

Although I need to retract that. James Cook does not send students our way. So we have a special tuition rate that James Cook charges us which is somewhere between our in state tuition and out of state tuition so it makes it feasible. But it's only Deakin University and Exeter that I can say are really active exchange programs at this point in time.

**Tomczyk:** When you say active exchange programs, you mean reciprocal agreements where we sent so many and they send the equal or similar amounts.

**Parsons:** Right. Otherwise, they are not exchange students. I always hear that on the news.

**Tomczyk:** It's used as a generic term.

**Parsons:** If you're only going one way, that's not an exchange.

**Tomczyk:** Right, but now there are so many it seems to me study abroad opportunities for our students that are related to classes for example or for a shorter period of time.

**Parsons:** Yes, we do a very good job of putting together short term study abroad programs for Maymester and the courses that are taught are taught by our faculty. They are satisfying degree requirements.

It very much serves the need of the student providing them with an opportunity to do something out of their comfort zone, which is a great thing. And also possibly and it does happen, it ignites a spark so they want to do something afterwards which is very gratifying. It's nice to see students get their feet wet. And say "Oh, I need to do more of this."

**Tomczyk:** How were those particular programs started? You talked about the exchange programs. You would pick up the phone in international programs and start that exchange. When it comes to the course things it really relates to the faculty member's interests, right? And they get it going?

**Parsons:** The short term study abroad process is very different. As you may know we have an application submission cycle for faculty who want to lead a short term study abroad program. And also, we have workshops helping faculty understand how to develop a short term study abroad program.

**Tomczyk:** Was that always the case?

**Parsons:** Over the last four or five years. And I used to run those sessions out of CeTeal (*CCU Center for Effective Teaching and Learning*). So every fall and every spring I would run a group

of maybe three or four sessions, just to help faculty understand what would be expected if they were to put together a study abroad proposal and how to do a budget.

**Tomczyk:** OK , so your audience was not just those faculty who definitely apply and to do a course, but it might have been those who were interested in the future to do it and they could learn what would be involved.

**Parsons:** And then maybe submit an application a year or two later which is what has happened. We have had faculty sit in and decide, well, this is not what they want to do this year. Since they have to go with another person. Generally we look for gender balance. Sometimes they find that professor within their department or their college or sometimes they find somebody in another college and that can be a wonderful experience, I think.

**Tomczyk:** Cross-disciplinary.

**Parsons:** Yes, exactly.

**Tomczyk:** So this is really left to the faculty to come up with these ideas. It could be that they had an undergraduate or graduate experience themselves that lead them to this. I'm thinking of these different courses. Don't we have one in archeology that goes to Kenya? Or we have a marine science one that goes to Bimini for the sharks?

**Parsons:** We do.

**Tomczyk:** So it's really up to the faculty member. Have you ever gone out to recruit a faculty member to do one?

**Parsons:** No, they self-select. With new faculty orientation, Dr Darla Domke-Damonte and I have been there the past half dozen years with a table. We explain the process and offer how supportive the university is of faculty wanting to develop one of these things. Of course, there are criteria. You have to have in county experience. Certainly, you don't want to be leading a group of students to a place where you've never been. So we want there to be extensive in county experience. If there is a foreign language is involved, you obviously have to have a language competency. We require that faculty leading our students have study abroad group leading experience here in a previous program if not as a program leader as a mentee. So you

can't go and lead a program unless you have a background that suggests you are able to handle it. We want to make sure that everyone is prepared.

**Tomczyk:** And depending on the time of year, that faculty member would have to get permission from their department or their college to make that part of their course load.

**Parsons:** Oh, certainly. The process is a year and a half from when somebody submits a proposal to when the program will actually take place. Proposal submissions usually take place...or we ask proposals to be developed in the fall. The committee reviews them in early spring and approves them and they are approved for the following year. Once they are approved in April of a year, then they can be promoted in May and June and our office, the Center for Global Engagement can upload this information to the Center's website so students and families can see them and sign up for programs.

**Tomczyk:** Do you know what the longest running study abroad program has been for Coastal?

**Parsons:** Well, currently it's the Costa Rica program. It alternates. We have a program in Costa Rica and we have one in Madrid. The hosting institutions have changed over the years. But Costa Rica and Madrid are pretty much it. Although, the Wall College has been doing a business program in Europe for almost as long but the cities they visit changes from year to year.

**Tomczyk:** I ask about longest running because I was going to follow up by asking what do you think their success is? What keeps them sustained?

**Parsons:** Well, I think the key is excellent faculty. Because a course in itself is not going to attract people, I don't think, unless you very much need a specific course for graduation. The professors who lead these have to have a particular skill set. You are on duty 24 hours a day. Not only do you teach, you are there in loco parentis.

**Tomczyk:** It's quite a responsibility.

**Parsons:** It IS quite a responsibility. So you have to be up to the challenge which is I think partly why the same professor doesn't do it every year, year after year. You have to take a break.

**Tomczyk:** It's quite a chore.

**Parsons:** It's a real chore. You are away from friends and family for three weeks or so . Even though family members can accompany teaching faculty nowadays, it's still a major change in your life to be gone for that period of time.

**Tomczyk:** What did you like best about travelling? Like where?

**Parsons:** Well what I liked best about travelling with students was watching them as they experience stuff for the first time.

**Tomczyk:** Can you give me an example?

**Parsons:** Well yes, I cite this example and it still sometimes gets to me. In the Oxford program – I remember - and it's already doing it to me; it's a funny thing. We always went to the city of Winchester and Winchester cathedral. I guess it was finished in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**Tomczyk:** a beautiful Gothic...

**Parsons:** Yes, a beautiful Gothic cathedral. One of our students was over in the corner crying. So I went over to see what was wrong. She just said she had never been in anything this old. So that was rather.

**Tomczyk:** I suspect she was having somewhat of a spiritual experience as well.

**Parsons:** I think so. I said, "Oh my." Those are the things you hope for.

**Tomczyk:** Exactly those are the types of new experiences that will stay with her forever.

**Parsons:** One of our Board of Trustees was on one of our programs. Natasha...?

**Tomczyk:** Hanna.

**Parsons:** [nodding] Natasha Hanna.

**Tomczyk:** When she was a student at the time?

**Parsons:** Yes, she was Natosha Mabry at the time. She took Richard Collin's course back in the early 90s and I occasionally see her and she remarks how wonderful that trip was for her and what an experience it was. That's very gratifying.

**Tomczyk:** So when do you get your “A-ha” moments when you travel. You’ve been so many places. I wonder if there are some new experiences that bring home that same kind of travel experience to you.

**Parsons:** I was in London in November on vacation. with friends.

**Tomczyk:** past November 2017.

**Parsons:** Yes, with friends. I hadn’t been back to Oxford since 2004. That’s a good while. We went to Oxford by train. I got off the train and seeing everything. I was giddy It was just like going to all these places that I had known so well and had spent every summer from 1990 to – through all of the 90s and maybe 2005 and then 2001. So for 12 years, someplace I went to every summer really. That was wonderful to see that I could still get excited about something.

**Tomczyk:** Was it because it was familiar? It was the same. It hadn’t changed?

**Parsons:** It hadn’t changed. As I told you I had done the study abroad program myself back in 1968 and my dorm room obviously in Christ Church College was the same as it was because the place is hundreds of years old. That sort of sweet nostalgia; it was really very nice.

I’m sort of, kind of happy where ever I go, If I go someplace new and meet new people or even someplace old and it’s a new experience, I just love travel. Almost from the point that I get to the airport. If I know I’m going to someplace exciting, I’m sort of cranked up as soon as I get to the airport.

**Tomczyk:** You think it’s part because you have an itinerary and it’s planned and you know where you’re going to go and what you’re going to do?

**Parsons:** No, because I don’t do that anymore. Although this trip...we had our airline tickets. We had an Airbnb. But other than that, there were no plans we just knew we were going to stay. There was a grocery store around the corner from the flat so we could get our food. That was the beauty of it. There was no itinerary. There was no “We all have to assemble at 7:55...”

**Tomczyk:** So that tension of trying to keep on schedule was not there. So we can drop you anywhere in the globe and you feel like you would be able to be OK.

**Parsons:** No.

**Tomczyk:** Where would you not feel that you would do OK?

**Parsons:** Well I mean I think I could survive. Places like Western Europe I love. I enjoy India. I was there for a wedding and that was fun but that's difficult place to navigate on your own. South America, yeah. No, probably not everywhere. I do think that when you travel you have to be prudent and aware of your surroundings. I think there are certain places I don't know well; that doesn't mean I wouldn't go. But they are just not necessarily high on my bucket list. There are places I would still like to go if given the opportunity or had the time to do so.

I, no, I don't think I'm much of a global citizen. I think that takes a skill set that I don't possess.

**Tomczyk:** Well I would kindly disagree with you. But we do hear that global citizenship is really becoming more and more a part of a college education.

**Parsons:** Oh yes I think it's critical.

**Tomczyk:** I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about how you envision international studies to be a part of a college education in the future. What challenges do you see maybe in making that a part of the curriculum or continuing that as part of the curriculum to make it effective.

**Parsons:** I think cross-cultural literacy is real important. I think particularly if you watch the news, which we all do, I think it's very important to understand where people come from - not just geographically but their point of reference. I think you develop a sensitivity to that if you travel. Because you are forced to interact with people who are very different from you as are they to interact with you. So, those challenges and how you navigate those challenges hopefully makes you more empathic and helps you understand what other people are going through when they are coming to a new country. You hope people will be kind and understanding when you go to a new country. Cross cultural literacy and understanding is very important.

Languages. If you can study one to the point when you can use it, it's terrifically important. . When you know another person's language, you will connect with them on a different level than with them speaking your language because they will express themselves with more color because they will be drawing on their vocabulary - their linguistic vocabulary in which they are fluent.

If you can pick up a language or two or three, that would be ideal. Those sorts of skills serve you well. I look at our graduates who are multilingual or bilingual. The world opens up to them professionally. They get offered jobs because of their cultural literacy.

We have a graduate Mark **Cesphack**. Mark is German and his father was in the automobile supply business and by that I mean selling vast numbers of automobile parts like Mercedes and VW and BMW and things like truck pistons and door handles and all that stuff.

**Tomczyk;** A lucrative sort of business.

**Parsons:** Yes. So Mark moved from Germany to Canada as a pre-teen. So he spoke fluent German and then picked up English. Then his father got a job in Mexico so he went to Mexico for a bit and picked up a bit of Spanish. Then Mark continued his studies here, his language studies. He's a friend on Facebook so I see his posts in German and English and Spanish so he's equally proficient in all three languages. He ended up working for an automobile supply company in Pueblo, Mexico providing parts to companies in Germany and in the United States.

It was not only his ability to speak the languages because he lived in all those places, he could interpret culture, which is one of the most important things when you are negotiating to understand where people are coming from, and realize what is considered good business practice, what is considered maybe offensive, or...

**Tomczyk:** to know their core values. So you think the only way you can really acquire that cross-cultural benefit is to live in the other country?

**Parsons:** I think it's the best way. Certainly nowadays with technology, you can interact with people electronically and not be there, but I think it's the best way. Most people don't have the opportunity to do that. Through higher education and through study abroad opportunities, you can acquire some of that. If you're brave enough to go abroad for a semester or academic year and work on a language, that's ideal. We've had students who have done that. We had a Socastee High School graduate who studied Spanish in high school then came to Coastal and studied Spanish with us maybe through the 300 level, three years' worth, he was a business major. Then went on our short term to Costa Rica and studied Spanish more. Then was brave enough to go to Universidad Europea de Madrid (UEM) in Madrid, Spain and did a full year there and by

the time he was done with that, he was pretty comfortable with his Spanish. He came back and graduated with his bachelor's degree in business and then did an internship in Ecuador. And when I was there six or seven years ago we went to see him and he was in a meeting and he was running the meeting all in Spanish. A Socastee high school graduate who now works for a major bank, lives in Miami and is a Central and South American rep for them because of his Spanish. So the world opened up to him because he was brave enough to develop more than just a casual knowledge of a language.

**Tomczyk:** So how do you envision international programs at Coastal ten years from now?

**Parsons:** Oh, gosh. I'm not prescient. I'm not that much of a visionary.

**Tomczyk:** Given what you've just described as valuable educational lessons, not that it would be financially feasible, taking the budget part out of it, the ideal experience to get that cross cultural and global appreciation. Would study abroad be a requirement for all graduates for example?

**Parsons:** Well, I don't know it should be a requirement for all graduates. I think it should be a degree track or option for a lot of degree programs. I think it could be embedded in the curriculum. You can choose something from block A or block B but block A will require a study abroad component. But people who can't or don't want to do that can opt for block B. If you make it part of the curriculum then people know from the get-go that this is what will be expected from them two or three years down the road, so they can prepare for that financially possibly by putting money away or linguistically if they are going choose to go to a place where English is not the language of instruction. I think that can be very important.

I think the country, the direction where the students go to study and live, changes depending on global circumstances. We are now teaching Arabic, which is great. It would be nice if we started teaching Chinese again. I can see that Russian would be interesting and Japanese. I think we may be because of our geographic isolation, you know sort of stuck between two oceans, our students don't appreciate the need - at least immediately - on an immediacy basis - the importance of language acquisition. You go to Europe and everybody speaks two or three languages. But then if you're in France and you're going to Italy for lunch well then, yea maybe you should know Italian.

**Tomczyk:** We still have a global studies minor don't we? I think?

**Parsons:** I don't know that we do. That would be Dr. Pam Martin's. I'm not sure where that has gone.

So I think it all depends on the individual department. If they value an international component to their degree program, then they can build something in.

**Tomczyk:** You know as you talk about it, it seems like I can't imagine a department that wouldn't see a need or that be able to find a connective opportunity that would be a study abroad in their major.

**Parsons:** Facebook and having friends in all departments, I do see our faculty when they go abroad on the holiday and sometimes go abroad with work related stuff. I think every department has a group of faculty members that are very passionate about international experiences. And I think every dean on this campus is supportive of that as well. I see that continuing. To grow, I don't know if that means grow in numbers of programs or to grow in terms of maybe year to year having different destinations available for study abroad opportunities. We are a university of a certain number of people so there a certain number of people who are interested in study abroad.

**Tomczyk:** Of course, there are places on the globe that are not safe to travel to. Was there ever an occasion when we had to cancel a program?

**Parsons:** Yes, as a matter of fact we were going to do a short term study abroad program in Egypt right before the Arab Spring. So we cancelled that I think in January. We only had one or two people signed up for the program but we knew things were going to be...

**Tomczyk:** That was a big decision to make at the time. There has never been a case when students were abroad where there has been an uprising or an issue and they had to come back.

**Parsons:** Well, not to have to come back. We had a professor who took a group of students to Kenya. They were going to fly back from Nairobi. There were terrorist threats from El Qaida. Nairobi closed the airport so our student had to be transported to Kampala, Uganda to return to the United States.

**Tomczyk:** I can't imagine what it took to divert that whole group. It was probably a large group wasn't it?

**Parsons:** Well it was a decent size group. I was not the one who arranged it. It was done through Lori Patterson because I happened to be in Madrid at the time. We were talking on the phone. As these arrangements were being made with Rich Koesterer as well.

**Tomczyk:** The faculty member.

**Parsons:** Yes, sorry, the faculty member. So it was interesting.

**Tomczyk:** I guess you just can't anticipate those things happening. You have to be ready for a Plan B.

**Parsons:** Yes, and sometimes... There have been Plan Bs that have been implemented and things just sort of worked out OK. But sadly I've...

**Tomczyk:** You what?

**Parsons:** I have blocked them out. [laughter]

**Tomczyk:** Oh, You blocked them out. Probably just as well. Let's hope the students and their parents have as well.

**Parsons:** Yes, knock wood. We've been very fortunate. Oh gosh, I've been involved in nearly thirty years of study abroad opportunities and we have not had many major issues.

**Tomczyk:** That's an excellent record.

**Parsons:** Well it's fortunate we've had good faculty and we've had good students. Things have gone well.

**Tomczyk:** Let me bring you back again, I started to ask you about your first coming to Coastal and how you got here. I wanted to ask you your impressions of Coastal. Granted you were a student when you started.

**Parsons:** Initially, an older graduate student. I was in my mid-thirties

**Tomczyk:** What were your impressions of Coastal when you came?

**Parsons:** Well I loved it. I had been to Virginia Tech which had at that time 16,000 students or something back in the early 70s. The size of Coastal was very appealing because it was small. It was a very welcoming place. Everyone sort of felt part of a family. Everyone chipped in to do stuff.

If you recall, I tell this story periodically. There are azaleas outside the gym right on University Drive [*boulevard*] that I planted with students. Because Sally Horner got us all together. We had a bunch of plants but...

**Tomczyk;** Sally Horner was VP of Finance.

**Parsons:** Yes. Sally Horner was the VP of Finance. We had a bunch of plants that had been delivered but we had nobody for some reason we had no one to plant them or we didn't have enough people to plant them. Sally Horner asked club leaders and I was head of the International Club at that point to get students together and...

**Tomczyk:** help plant them

**Parsons:** Yes help plant. There are azaleas out front that I helped plant back in the I guess late 80s early 90s I don't remember exactly. And a couple of the students who were here have come back recently and remember planting those plants

**Tomczyk:** it makes you part of the community for things like that.

**Parsons:** very much when you can point to flowers and say, "I put that there"! Yes, it was a lovely place. Everyone was very collegial.

I remember there were student activity events that would be held on the weekend. I'd be asked "Are you free? Can you come and do something between 8pm and 1am?" I'd say, Yeah, Sure. Everyone just helped. There were student activities that were ongoing and you needed bodies to help make things happen so it was fun to participate.

**Tomczyk:** What sort of activities?

**Parsons:** Well like Casino Night or events that were designed as fundraisers or designed for kids who lived in the dorms to keep....

**Tomczyk:** on campus

**Parsons:** On campus stuff, so that was always fun.

**Tomczyk:** I remember you used to do International Fairs.

**Parsons:** Oh. Food sales, too, which the health department would probably not permit now.

**Tomczyk:** I don't believe anyone got sick though from eating those delicious dishes from all over the world.

**Parsons:** Oh no, we were scrupulously clean. And the food, I certainly understood keeping things at the right temperature so they wouldn't spoil.

**Tomczyk:** You are bit of a gourmet yourself so you know proper food preparation.

**Parsons:** Well I know how to cook. I would not serve someone a quiche that had gone off or something like that.

**Tomczyk:** What kinds of dishes did you have? Do you remember some of the things? There were some exotic things. You always had it during lunchtime so people would be able to go out. You had a table set up outside and grab a few things. The international students were there.

**Parsons:** Well they made their own food. They brought the stuff in. I think we made \$600 or \$700 one day. That was very helpful with our trip to Washington, DC. We got a budget but some had to be self-funded. The students worked hard for that.

They made food from their home countries. The French students would make crepes. The Icelandic students one year brought – they had it shipped in – half of a sheep head and fermented shark and hardfiskur which is dried fish that you cover with schmear which is the Icelandic word for butter and their butter is almost orange. It's so pretty; very great taste.

The Germans... and any number of different foods that students made back home. They would bring. We did well; well enough that every semester we would send out an announcements what

day was the food sale and people would call to see what would we serve. 6 or 7 bucks, which in the 90s was a lot of money. it went for a good cause. It was very nice that people did that. [smile] That was fun.

**Tomczyk:** So after you got your master's degree you were working. I'm trying to determine when you shifted from a graduate assistant in the international programs office to an employee, and the interview process and what happened...

**Parsons:** I reflected on this a good bit. I think I was part time I had to be because I was still pursuing my masters. I think I started out as a graduate assistant for a year and then I was hired part time I don't know what the term was back in those days. But working a good number of hours a week because, what I didn't mention is - after I got hired as a graduate assistance Steve Nagle Dr Nagle and his wife Dr. Sanders had a Fulbright to Poland so they left and there was no one there other than me.

**Tomczyk:** they had to hire you full time then.

**Parsons:** Well they hired me. I think I was full time hours wise but whatever you call that kind of an employee with benefits. That didn't happen until Feb 1<sup>st</sup> of 1990. So I was... what do you call that kind of employee?

**Tomczyk;** Temporary?

**Parsons:.** Thank you – that would be the word. Temporary. Yes.

**Tomczyk:** and you didn't have a slot.

**Parsons:** No I didn't have a slot. No so by then I had run the study abroad programs for a couple of semesters. I had a reasonable rapport with the international students. Although we were not the visa issuing office or the Immigration document issuing office for Coastal at that point.

**Tomczyk:** You were later, though?

**Parsons:** WE were later but I had had that experience coincidentally in the 70s when I worked for a school in Washington, DC so I understood what the I-20 was for and what the DS-2019 was for because I was the individual who prepared those documents in my previous life

**Tomczyk:** So you really came with a skill set that was very adaptive to this position.

**Parsons:** Yes, really so, it was an odd background that seemed to be from my perspective almost perfect fit. It seemed to have worked out rather well given that it took thirty years! I don't know, Did I get off track?

**Tomczyk:** No, not at all. We were talking about how your status changed from student assistant and then to full time. After Nagle and Sanders returned from Poland, you continued full time then?

**Parsons:** Well yes. Working for Steve Nagle I was in connection with the study abroad programs sort of was academic so I was under the Provost but working with international students was more student affairs. So that's how I had sort of a dual reporting line. And that involved Dr. Bob Squatriglia [*VP for Student Affairs*] and Joe Mazurkiewicz actually. I reported to Joe Mazurkiewicz.

**Tomczyk:** Who was the Counseling Services Director?

**Parsons:** Yes, so there was that overlap and then...

**Tomczyk:** That was the very beginning. That was an odd combination wasn't it?

**Parsons:** It was an odd combination. And then ultimately my reporting line was to Steve Nagle, and the Provost and then the Associate Provost. So that occurred in probably 92 if I remember correctly and may not. It was a while back.

**Tomczyk:** I wanted to ask you a lit actually le bit more something you're already talked about some of the students you knew here and how they got along after graduation, how you assisted them when they were here. You've always done a lot of traveling and some of that travel was to visit former students.

**Parsons:** Mostly it still is.

**Tomczyk:** Can you talk a little bit more about that?

**Parsons:** Well as you may know, I have close connections with students who were here in the late 80s and early 90s mostly because they were young and I was younger than I am now. It was a simpler time. So I got to know these students well. I did a lot of entertaining at my house. Students came. I'd have students come over in groups for dinner. In those days, I had recollection of picking up students at 3 o'clock in the morning at the airport. Because campus security would call me and say "Oh somebody contacted did not come to pick them up. Would you go pick them up at the airport?" I would do that. I would have to put them in the guest room in my house because I couldn't get them into housing at 3am and I couldn't get them into a hotel.

**Tomczyk;** that would make you a lifelong friend.

**Parsons:** Yes, so I had those kinds of relationships with some of these students. Some of them because we weren't so... The pace of life was not so intense. Students would come in and talk with me about their problems. I had one student who came from Pakistan from a very conservative military background. He found adjusting to Myrtle Beach very difficult. He called me every night at 7 o'clock for a semester at my home.

**Tomczyk:** For what purpose?

**Parsons:** To talk with an adult. Again, this was the early 90s. Calling long distance would have been be a fortune to call back home. Obviously you can't face time anybody. I was his lifeline. Well that sounds a bit dramatic.

**Tomczyk:** Well his community...his support group.

**Parsons:** Yes, so he would call me every semester, every night at seven we would chat 10 or 15 minutes and he would be OK. I probably would see him the next day sometimes because something else would come up about South Carolina culture that was confounding to him. He has done marvelously well. He is a regional rep for a big company in the United States and he lives in North Carolina.

The people that I see, I visit friends in France who are married and I introduced them to one another.

**Tomczyk:** when they were here?

**Parsons:** Yes, when they were here. Both French but from different parts of the country. I have a good friend from India who I visit once or twice a year. I have friends in London who I saw in November. I was there again in March, I saw the husband for a quick lunch, and I'm going there again in August so I will see them again at some point.

These are friends. They were students at that point. But they are friends so when I go to visit them it's interesting to have a conversation with someone who doesn't develop those relationships. I don't develop them now because I'm at a different age and the students but back then people I met became friends.

The friend I visited who is from n India I was in his wedding back in 1999 in India.

**Tomczyk:** A formal role in the wedding.

**Parsons:** Yes, I was one of the groomsmen.

**Tomczyk:** That's quite an honor.

**Parsons:** Yes, it was. There were three of us.

**Tomczyk:** and quite a different ceremony than we would have in the US.

**Parsons:** Oh yes, very much. The reception in this particular case occurred before the wedding and the reception has 2000 people and then the wedding.

**Tomczyk:** that's a big stag party.

**Parsons:** Well no, the wedding was...

**Tomczyk:** This event precedes the wedding

**Parsons:** It precedes because that's how it takes place. The reception is for everybody who is important to your family and friends. There were dignitaries. The father of this student was a prominent person in the government so there were all sorts of dignitaries with bodyguards in attendance at this reception. And the wedding which I was very honored to attend there were only seven of us. Maybe ten of us in a tent with a priest.

**Tomczyk:** A very personal thing

**Parsons:** Oh yes. It was quite an honor. The tent was not ten feet across.

**Tomczyk:** when you say a priest you mean...

**Parsons:** A Hindu priest and that was all in Sanskrit so that was fascinating to listen to. It was lovely. It was a wonderful time. I'm fortunate enough to see these people periodically. I visit them and we take vacations together.

These are the relationships that matter. I think I was saying at an event not too long ago that I think I have two friendships that sustain that predate my time at Coastal. Everybody else I know in my life that is not related to me by blood is somebody I know from here.

**Tomczyk:** Well, the most amount of time was spent here.

**Parsons:** Well that is true; thirty years you would expect that. For a long time my social life and my personal life were pretty much the same thing. Coastal has always been a family. Just because I wasn't wearing my director of international programs and services' hat didn't mean I wasn't involved in something else on campus doing something else maybe with other colleagues. Because it seemed like a cool thing to do it was nice to help. That kind of thing also fosters relationships that become friendships because you spend a lot of time together.

**Tomczyk:** particularly with your position, a good part of your daily time was spent with Coastal people or Coastal students.

**Parsons:** Oh yes. Seven days a week at some point. It just never stops. But that was fine because that was the way it needed to be.

**Tomczyk:** Before I go on to my general questions that I ask everyone, is there anything else that you would like to say about international programs.

**Parsons:** Well, other than it's been a wonderful life. I have no idea what would have happened had I not come here. It feels also serendipitous. An ill parent and you come down thinking you're going to stay a bit then move on, move back to New York or something like that. Then you find you stayed thirty years.

**Tomczyk:** You did so much, met so many people and went so many places

**Parsons:** It's been very rewarding. I noticed today, this is the first time I've come back – other than a brief lunch with a colleague a few weeks ago - it feels very like home, seeing everybody. So, I probably will continue to show up.

**Tomczyk:** Good. I'm glad you will; many times I hope

Well in that same vein, what do you see as the biggest change that occurred at Coastal from the time you started here?

**Parsons:** Oh, Size.

**Tomczyk:** I'm sorry?

**Parsons:** Size. Size of the campus number of buildings, number of students, number of faculty and staff, we've grown tremendously. Yeah, that's it. Sometimes I still am surprised at the number of buildings that have been built in the past three years. Size, yes size.

**Tomczyk:** Size, not just in enrollment but in size of the campus and programs...

**Parsons;** and the shuttle service and football stadium... services, a big, big difference.

**Tomczyk:** What are the challenges that you think Coastal will face as it moves into the future?

**Parsons:** Size.

**Tomczyk:** Same thing.

**Parsons:** Growing pains. I think when your numbers increase rapidly and you have to quickly adjust, I guess the thing you have to do immediately is you have enough faculty to teach the students. Where are you going to teach them? Do you have enough classroom space? All of a sudden, my experience even before coming here is growth always happens ahead of your planning. You always have more stuff, or students or something before you have the ability to take care of them. It just depends on how quickly you can respond.

**Tomczyk:** Managed growth?

**Parsons:** Yes, that's it. Managed growth.

**Tomczyk:** What was the most significant event at CCU that changed you or had an effect on you during your time here?

**Parsons:** I think everything. I don't know that it's one event. It's always been a student. It's always been some sort of issue with a student. I think the responsibility that you feel for students when you know they are abroad is one thing because you are very concerned about their safety and their well-being.

But also I've spent time with the parents of students who have been in severe accidents. We've had two students from India in the distant past who required extensive care; because one a drowning and one an automobile accident. Fortunately, they both recovered with their facilities intact. It was a long road for both of them.

I remember driving one of the parents who flew over here from India. I drove him down to Charleston three times a week.

**Tomczyk:** To MUSC?

**Parsons:** To MUSC for about a month. It was during the summer. Not that it would have mattered, the reality issue is you take care of people. Sitting that father while his son was in a n induced coma was pretty awful

You get to know those people because you spent so much time with them.

**Tomczyk:** I tend to forget that friendships don't just roll out of happy times together but going through very difficult times as well.

**Parsons:** It's very nice. I still get cards from parents years after the fact. The most significant stuff is the relationships that came out of all this.

**Tomczyk:** As you think about your time at Coastal, are there any specific events that you want to recount – or some specific memory or impression you would like to close with?

**Parsons:** Well...I think...um...

**Tomczyk:** There are so many. I can see you going through those memory files with different of thousands of kinds of things. ...

**Parsons:** I think personal connections are the most important things. When you mentioned managed growth, I hate to see growth get in the way of allowing conversation. I don't like to be the person when someone comes to the door and needs to be seen because something is going on in their life, and I have to reply "I'm sorry, I can't. I'm busy." That's a horrible thing to say to somebody who may need someone to talk to. And often times when you're not available, they don't come back.

**Tomczyk:** So it would become fast-paced and growth is kind of out of control, it's more likely for that to happen.

**Parsons:** I think so and then you don't form the connections and then you miss something when you might have been able to offer somebody a respite when they can just sit and chat. There were students in the old days "again in the old days". They would come in and chat for a minute and then just say "can I do my homework her in the office?" And they just needed a place where they felt at home. And I don't see that being the case. Life is too busy.

**Tomczyk:** And space is at a premium.

**Parsons:** Yes, space is at a premium. We occasional would have students maybe not for an entire semester, but for a while until they felt comfortable. They just wanted to hang out and

maybe get a free cup of coffee and maybe just sit for an hour or two and be left alone, particularly if you're navigating in a country where the language is different from what you speak at home. Sometimes your head needs a rest. So - what was the questions? [smile}

**Tomczyk:** That was something you would like to see continue at Coastal.

**Parsons:** I think the challenge is to finding what that ideal ratio is between student to staff. Student to faculty

**Tomczyk:** Oh, and we promote that it's still 18:1 or 19:1

**Parsons:** But that's not the way it is with staff. Staff play a very significant role in serving students whether it's before they get here, while they are here or maybe on the back end. I would hate to see that the attention to that particular number not be given. Staff to students is a real important number to be mindful of.

**Tomczyk:** That answers my question. Your impression of Coastal going forward. I think that is probably a very important significant thing and it's not necessarily academic.

**Parsons:** No. But you also have to hire the right people. I know we occasionally think we have people who may not be as sensitive as they should be but I think if people are burned out or overworked or fell exhausted they are not as pleasant because they are stressed too they have deadlines and things that are considered more important than their interactions with students. So something has to suffer. There are certainly a few exceptions. I think there are some wonderful exceptions on campus who are charming. When you think how in the world can you be charming when you've had the day or the week that you have had... We have some bone fide saints that work on campus.

**Tomczyk:** Do you think this new Feel the Teal program has helped in that regard or is it missing the mark with the staff – student connection?

**Parsons:** I think you can make people who are not particularly student friendly more aware, but you can't create nice people. You have to hire nice people. You have to allow time for people. You don't form a connection with someone with a snippet of time.

**Tomczyk:** It has to be cultivated.

**Parsons:** It has to be cultivated and it has to be in an environment where not only the student feels happy but the staff person feels happy. And there's time when that's considered valuable part of what they do.

**Tomczyk:** You just described the environment for education. You're not going to learn anything right, unless you feel safe and comfortable.

**Parsons:** You are absolutely right. You are absolutely right.

**Tomczyk:** We just need more of that.

**Parsons:** Yeah. And I think you need to look for it because there are people out there that have that. It needs to be one of the hiring criteria. So if you're looking for somebody who is cut and

dry and can perform a particular function, don't expect them to be something other than that because if it's not a skill set they possess or can't even develop.

Not everybody has the same skills. We cannot all play the piano or sing opera. I think having the ability to relate to people is another skill set like that. It's out there but not everybody possesses it.

**Tomczyk:** We do this through our code of Ethics at Coastal. We do have a requirement certain set of values and that is respecting others. How we operationalize that is something else but the expectation is there.

**Parsons:** I can't recall any particular circumstance when a faculty or staff member has been unkind to a student. I just worry about people begin taxed.

**Tomczyk:** Again following up on the fast pace and the growth of Coastal.

**Parsons;** Yes. I still think it's a wonderful place. I have a lot of faculty friends. They talk about how they love their students and how they get a lot of support in their department. So I think I'm quite a fan.

**Tomczyk:** I'm glad you are still a fan, Geoff.

**Parsons:** Oh yeah, Coastal's great.

**Tomczyk:** You have really added so much to the culture of Coastal helped the students, faculty and staff here in ways that I think they would have never gotten elsewhere. Because you created a really neat program. It was a fledgling program when you came here. You really opened up so many doors to students and faculty to have an opportunity in education that they wouldn't normally have here. Thank you so much for what you've done.

**Parsons:** Thank you.

**Tomczyk:** Thanks for talking with me today.

**Parsons:** Thank you.