**Ed Sams**

Written by Melanie Le and Jaywood Tse

This semester, Instructor Ed Sams is retiring after 22 years of teaching in the English Department at San José State University. The Department of English and Comparative Literature celebrates his achievements and his influence.

In his time at SJSU, Sams taught a variety of courses in composition and literature, but some of his favorites included Fantasy and Science Fiction and The Graphic Novel. Sams was a member of the SJSU English Department Policy Committee as well as national organizations the College English Association and the Western Folklore Society.

Sams had always wanted to teach and write, but he actually came across the opportunity to teach at SJSU by chance. He began his teaching career at 24 years old after he received his Master’s degree in English. A Tennessee native, Sams moved to California afterward, saying, “Spirit of the times brought me to Cali. I quit my job, packed my car, and headed west.” Not long after, his play *The Ghost Club* was in production at a haunted hotel in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and one of his performers was Paul Douglass, the chair of the English Department at SJSU at the time. Douglass had an emergency hire to fill, and he asked Sams if he was interested in teaching a section of English 1B. Sams took some time to look over the campus and soon agreed to take the position. About this decision, he says he “never looked back.”

From his time at SJSU, Sams will miss his students and colleagues the most, including the office staff, who Sams says are the best on campus. One of his favorite memories is reciting “The Raven” at the annual SJSU Poe Fest.

Outside of teaching, Sams has written a wide variety of plays, and many of them have been in production in Northern California and New York. He is most proud of his melodrama *Love on the Loathsome Stage.* The play was first produced by Mountain Community Theater in Ben Lomond, California in 1993, and it was revived again in 1999 and 2008. Of all his plays, Sams says itis the one he and his wife enjoy reminiscing upon the most.

Additionally, Sams and his wife founded Yellow Tulip Press in 1992, which publishes “curious chapbooks on lurid topics.” He mentions that the chapbooks have served as a source of inspiration. He says they “have given me a lot of interesting information to add color to examples that I use in class.“

After he retires, Sams plans on to continue working on his plays, helping his community, and spending time with his family. He is currently revising the play *Our American Cousin* to include the assassination of Abraham Lincoln on stage. He says, “It ends warm. I'd like to see that performed.” Sams is also planning to be active at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Santa Cruz, where he teaches Sunday School. He says he looks forward to “watching my granddaughter grow” the most.

San José State University and the English Department will greatly miss Ed Sams, and we wish him the best of luck in his retirement!

**Questions and Answers**

1. **What was your life like earlier in your life? Did you think you would be teaching as a career?**
   1. I began teaching when I was 24 just after I received my Master's degree in English. I always wanted to teach and to write.
2. **Do you see similarities between current SJSU students and you when you were a student?**
   1. Students in the 70s were more free-spirited than the students today, and for good reason; then was an easier time than now.
3. **How has living and teaching in Tennessee affected your creative and teaching work?**
   1. My novella *Wicked Hill* is an Appalachian witch tale based on superstitions I heard when I was growing up.
4. **What brought you to California and SJSU?**
   1. I realize that I neglected to answer the most crucial question: how I came to SJSU. It's a funny story. My play The Ghost Club was in production at a haunted hotel in the Santa Cruz Mountains (it since burned down), and one of my performers was Paul Douglass, Chair of the English Department at San Jose State. He had an emergency hire to fill and asked if I were interested in teaching a 7:30 a.m. Tuesday/Thursday class of English 1B. I said I'd look over the campus and let him know. I did, agreed, and never looked back.
   2. Spirit of the times brought me to Cali. I quit my job, packed my car, and headed west.
5. **What are you looking forward to about your retirement?**
   1. Cleaning house and weeding my garden.
6. **What obstacles or challenges did you learn the most from throughout your career?**
   1. To have faith when there is no hope.

Research and Creative Work

1. **What topics or themes often come up in your plays? Why?**
   1. Most of my plays deal with rebelling against authority. Why? I guess that's the way my mind works.
2. **Which production are you most proud of and why?**
   1. *Love on the Loathsome Stage* was a melodrama produced by Mountain Community Theater in 1993, and revived in 1999, and then revived again in 2006. It's the play my wife and I enjoy reminiscing about the most.
3. **Do you plan to continue writing and developing plays after you retire? What other plans do you have?**
   1. I have revised *Our American Cousin* to include the assassination of Abraham Lincoln on stage; it ends warm. I'd like to see that performed.
   2. Watching my granddaughter grow.
4. **How did your research and creative work influence your teaching?**
   1. My chapbooks published by the Yellow Tulip Press have given me a lot of interesting information to add color to examples that I use in class.
5. **What is your method when researching a topic? (e.g. do you immerse yourself in the topic or do you take an analytical approach to it?)?**
   1. I read as much as I can and follow the leads that take me to strange and wild places.

SJSU

1. **How long have you taught at SJSU?**
   1. 22 years.
2. **What courses did you teach? Which was your favorite and why?**
   1. I taught mostly composition, also American literature, but my favorite classes have been Fantasy/Science Fiction and the Graphic Novel.
3. **What drove you to teach this subject? And why at SJSU?**
   1. I do as I'm told and taught the classes that I was assigned.
4. **What will you miss the most from your time at SJSU?**
   1. I shall miss my students and my colleagues, including the office staff. We have the best office crew on campus.
5. **What is one of your favorite moments as a faculty member at SJSU?**
   1. I have always enjoyed reciting "The Raven" at Poe Fest.

Service and Community Work

1. **I saw that you and your wife founded Yellow Tulip Press. Can you tell me a little more about that?**
   1. I had a tenure tract job in 1992 that was eliminated in state budget cuts during the national recession. My wife Sally told me, "There are no slaves, only a slave mentality," so we decided to start our business: curious chapbooks on lurid topics.
2. **Is there any committee work at SJSU that you’re particularly proud of or found memorable?**
   1. I was proud to be elected to the English Department's policy committee.
3. **Are you or were you a member of any professional organizations in your field?**
   1. College English Teachers, Western Folklore Society.
4. **What service work during your career are you most proud of?**
   1. I have worked at a local food pantry and served as a volunteer librarian at a community library. I am an elder in the Presbyterian Church where for years I taught Sunday School.
5. **How do you expect to continue to serve the field even in your retirement?**
   1. I plan to be active at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Santa Cruz.