

Interviewee: Cynthia Haynes [H]
Interviewer: Emily Katseanes [K]
Transcriber: Elizabeth McGhee Williams
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Transcript

[ambient sounds of other interviews in background]

K: I am Emily Katseanes. I am interviewing—

H: Cynthia Haynes.

K: Yeah! It's—June 2nd? [confirms date] Yep! At 1:56 p.m. So, would you tell me about when you first joined RSA?

H: Wow, I can't actually remember if I'd joined at the time, but it was in grad school because the first conference, I know, was at The University of Texas at Arlington. So when the first conference was held—the first three conferences actually. And I was one of the grad students helping work the registration table and going to the airport picking up the keynote speakers. Those are my early memories, you know, of RSA. I'm sure I joined, but I don't remember. [chuckles] So I guess I could say that's when I first joined because that's when I was heavily involved with those conferences. And Charles Kneupper was one of my professors. I know Michael Feehan, who's probably talked to you already about Charles. Maybe others. So that goes back as far as '84 or '5 or '6 or whenever that first conference was.¹ I started there in '84 as a grad student, but I think maybe the first conference was '86? I think they have been on even years.

K: I think so.

H: There were three. The first three were at Arlington. And then I heard in the "First 25 Years" panel the other day,² it was Rich Enos that might have been explaining that then the fourth one was in the early 90s—maybe '92. So, maybe it was '84, '86, '88, or '86, '88, '90. Something like that because I was there between '84 and '94, and we had three conferences. And Jim Berlin was one of the keynote speakers—that might have been the second one.³ But, yeah.

K: How would you describe the organization you experienced in those early years? And maybe how it's changed?

¹ The biennial conferences at UT-Arlington occurred in 1984, 1986, 1988, and 1990. Charles Kneupper passed away while the 1990 conference was being planned.

² I.e., session F15 at the 2018 RSA conference: "The RSA Fellows Remember: 50 Years in Retrospect, the First 25 Years."

³ Berlin was the keynote speaker at the 1988 Arlington conference.

H: Yeah. It's certainly grown. I mean, I haven't been actually to RSA in ten years, to the conference, because my husband and I—he's Norwegian, and we have a home in Norway and in May is the only time we can go. So for the last ten years or so we usually go to Norway in May. But this year I won the 2017 book award,⁴ so I'm coming to accept the award and then I gave a paper. But, so, ten years ago I went to the one in Seattle. I think it was ten years ago.⁵ And prior to that it was—again, for the last 20 years or so we've been in Norway—but I was at those first three. And my experience in the organization is that it's been more of my academic home than 4Cs⁶ or Computers and Writing, even though I've been very active in those. I've gone to 4Cs every year—except for the last two or three years—for many, many years. But that's—this conference now feels as big as 4Cs, but it feels very different because it's—it's more focused on rhetoric, of course. [both laugh] I can do more of my thing, which is rhetorical theory and criticism and performative delivery of my talks and feel at home—that I have an audience. I guess it's important that that audience in this organization feels like more of my audience. I mean, I am a writing program director, so 4Cs in that sense would be, you know, for that part of what I do. I don't publish—I'm not a scholar, though, in composition studies or WPA administration or any of that. It's just my day job. [both laugh] I mean, a *long* one. I've been doing that for 24 years. But rhetoric is my love, you know. And that's what I do. So this conference has always been my academic conference, really. I just don't get to come as often as I'd like. I wish it was every year. I mean, could I put in a plug to the powers that be, please? [both laugh] I have never been to one of the summer institutes, but I would like to get involved in those and maybe teach one of the seminars, or team-teach it, however they are done. My students have gone, though, and they've always benefitted from them and have come back with amazing experiences. So the summer institutes have been very important to many of the students in our—at Clemson, that are in our Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design [RCID] PhD program. And when I was—before [being] at Clemson, I was in another graduate humanities program, but we didn't have a concentration in rhetoric. In fact, I was the only rhetoric faculty member at the University of Texas at Dallas because it was a humanities program with no departments. So I answered to the dean, and we had tracks of literary studies and historical studies and aesthetic studies, which had the creative writers. But I ran the first-year rhetoric program and then taught graduate courses in rhetoric. And many of those students went on to go into the field of rhetoric rather than literary studies. But all that to say is that the WPA part and 4Cs and the distinction between how our field [pause] bifurcates itself in a way, between composition and rhetoric. In fact, I wrote a piece one time for—the *enculturation* journal did a little issue, I don't know how many years ago. Those of us who were invited to contribute were to discuss the slash between “composition” and “rhetoric.”⁷ Or, you know—mine was actually on the *slash*. [chuckles] And it was more on the rhetoric side. Anyway, I'm kind of rambling on that part.

⁴ Haynes won the award for *The Homesick Phone Book: Addressing Rhetorics in the Age of Perpetual Conflict*.

⁵ The RSA conference was held in Seattle in 2008.

⁶ Conference on College Composition and Communication.

⁷ Issue 5.1 of *enculturation*, published in 2003.

[06:52]

K: You're totally good. Congrats on your book award.

H: Oh, thank you.

K: [chuckles] I know that you mentioned rhetoric is kind of your love.

H: Yeah.

K: Aside from, like, that specific focus, what else do you think makes RSA such a nice academic home? Which is good phrasing, by the way. I really like that.

H: Well, for one thing it was small. And that felt intimate. Which doesn't mean the fact that it's grown is bad. I enjoy that I've met a lot of really interesting people and seen some fascinating research presented. And in fact, it has been many years since I have gone back-to-back panels three days in a row. And I can't be here tomorrow—but many years, because I just don't have the stamina for it. But I couldn't not be here. First of all, I have many students here. I have probably ten PhD students presenting, and so I've been in and out, and former students who are out and tenured. But I have been to some panels of people I don't know! [chuckles] But the intimacy of it. And I think Rich Enos explained it the other night in this "First 25 Years" panel that Rhetoric Society of America was called a "society" for a reason. Because it was a community of people and not an association, or organization, or whatever. And that resonated with me because it has been. And because it was so small—and I mean *really* small—when it first started, in terms of conferences. I don't, prior to '84—and I learned a lot from that panel, because Janice Lauer and Mike Halloran and Kathleen Welch and Victor [Vitanza] and Rich were all explaining the early years in the 60s and 70s, which was fascinating—but they didn't organize a conference until, you know, the mid-80s, and Charles Kneupper did that. And I want to talk a little bit more about Charles whenever you're ready. [pause] But yeah, one of the reasons was because in the beginning it was so intimate. And these stars, to me, in rhetoric, the people I was studying, and actually studying with—I was very fortunate to have those people in the program I was in—were so down to earth. I mean, I remember Jim Berlin, the year he was keynote, and I think we took him out to a Mexican restaurant one night, and he loved it. And he lived up in Purdue in West Lafayette, and I sent him—I mailed him [chuckles] tacos. I mean, all the stuff to make tacos. I'll put it that way. And the guacamole. I mailed him stuff to make—everything you needed because this was in Texas. I'm a Texan. He loved the Mexican food. So that was kind of a little cute anecdote, that Berlin was like that, you know? And Victor was my chair. And Victor and Jim were extremely close. There was a comradery between Jim's students and Victor's students, and so there still is. The academic children and grandchildren of those two men, and the women also—Susan Jarratt, Jan Swearingen. Jan was at UT-Arlington, and Susan was at that conference, and Kathleen Welch was at that conference, and Winifred Horner from TCU,⁸ and those folks from the TCU crowd, which was just next to Fort Worth and Arlington together. So in the

⁸ Texas Christian University.

beginning it was just this very intimate group of graduate students of these people and the scholars and rhetoricians that just formed a real cohesive grounding and foundation. I guess I'll put it that way. [pause] Very formative for me.

[11:20]

K: That sounds like a great way to sort of be introduced into a field. To have those colleagues and relationships.

H: Right.

K: Did he ever make the tacos? Did he tell you?

[both laugh]

H: Yeah, he did. And they made it there all intact. I don't even remember what I said, but he reminded me several years later—before he died—that I had done that. And I had totally forgotten. So I've kept that memory now because—I don't know, it was a whim, I guess, that I mailed him the taco stuff. Jim was—I remember when we learned he died. Victor was teaching and his wife went to tell him, to get him out of class, because she knew it was going to be devastating. That was very hard. By then I had already taken my first job at UT-Dallas, so I wasn't—I had graduated. I think it was '93, '94, '95—it was around then.⁹ I can't remember. But, yeah.

K: Certainly a loss of a very important person.

H: Yes, very much. I went to Purdue to give a talk a couple years—3, 4, 5 years ago—and Thomas Rickert and Jenny Bay took me into the Berlin archives. I mean, they've got a room with all of his papers. And I was just like, "Oh my gosh. This is amazing." And it meant a lot to me because this is what I did for Charles Kneupper. When Charles died, and I'll tell you a little bit about that—

K: Absolutely, I'd love to hear that.

H: When Charles died, and this was in the late 80s when AIDS was not something, even when sexual preference was not, and Charles was not—we knew, but many people didn't know at all about his private life or anything. And when he got sick, it happened fast. He went down very fast. Okay. So he passed away, and I was very devastated. Well, if you can believe this or not, there were people who didn't—his own family did not want his things. There were people that didn't want to touch his things, if you can believe that, because he passed away of AIDS and AIDS complications. And I was a graduate student and director of the writing center at the same time. I had—the last four years I was working on my, I had finished my coursework but I was working on my dissertation, and I was directing the writing center. And our writing center was in a former department, so we had not just one room. We had a floor, and it had multiple

⁹ James Berlin passed away in 1994.

offices and those were our tutoring rooms. And then it had a couple of rooms with computers in them. So, Charles's books in his office—and I said, “I want to make a Charles Kneupper Memorial Library.” So I did. And I cleaned his office out, I saved his papers, organized them. I moved the books. He was on the second floor, and I moved them up to the fifth floor where the writing center was. I took one of those tutoring rooms—it was small but it was enough, about the size of his office, actually, because it was a faculty office originally. So I set up the Charles Kneupper Memorial Library, and it was for the grad students. Now it was in the undergraduate—well, the writing center was for everybody but it was mostly an undergraduate writing center—but I wanted to make it comfy. So I brought some of my own stuff from home. I brought a lamp and a table, and had a reading area and the books, and I shelved them, categorized them. I had a stamp made [claps to indicate stamping] that went in every book: “Charles Kneupper Memorial Library.” And it was for graduate students because this was, you know, his library. Of texts and back issues of journals and tons of—back then, because we all had to Xerox-copy things out of stuff, and I still have some of that. And I kept his dissertation. His family, like I said, didn't want anything. I kept his bound copy of his dissertation—which I still have. I didn't leave it. I don't know why, but I just kept it. [pause] And I have some of his syllabi; I just kept a few of those. And sadly, many years ago, this was back in 1990—I want to say '89, '90, something like that—that I was doing this. And after I left UT-Arlington, they moved the [Kneupper] library to the actual campus library. And then they dispersed the books, and I don't know what happened to them. They just took it down. And we have no idea where any of the books went. They might have gone into the library—I just don't know. Much less the papers. I have no idea.

[17:02]

K: That's a really moving tribute that you did. I'm sad to hear that that's sort of the epilogue to it.

H: Yeah. But it meant a lot to me to do that for him. And for us. And for our grad students. And it was well-utilized. There were a lot of times when people would just come up there and be in a quiet place and sit. And I interviewed Victor for *Harper's Magazine*,¹⁰ we sat in there, so it was kind of a place where it—just felt good to be in there. And I took a picture of Charles' door before I took everything down because we all had, as faculty members, what I call “door art.” [K chuckles] I could even send that to you, if you want.¹¹

K: Yeah!

H: I don't know what you are gonna do with these, but...

¹⁰ See “Reading, Writing, Rambling On” in the January 1994 issue of *Harper's*.

¹¹ Haynes' photos of Kneupper's door and the memorial library are available as supplementary materials in the RSA Oral History Initiative archive.

K: You know what, I— [shuffling papers] Yeah, we'll get an email that you can send it to because that would be really cool.

H: Yeah, it's just a picture of his door before I took all the stuff off of it down. We just put quotes and things on there. You know, pictures. I don't remember what all was on it. And, so yeah. That's one of the main things I wanted to share because he was very—the other thing I wanted to talk about with him was, in terms of RSA, as a rhetoric grad student, I was always working on my writing and trying to improve my writing. And Charles said, "Well, you can study what we are assigning you to read as *pieces of writing*." I went, "Wow!" [both laugh] You know, stylistically. It was mind-blowing. I went, "Oh!" All these things I have stacks of—because I had issues with, like, my repertoire of variety of verbs used to introduce quotes. Just that kind of thing, you know? When you're writing your dissertation, or your prospectus or whatever. So what I did was I took an article of Charles's—it was like a 40-page article, I don't remember which one. And I wrote down all the ways that he structured folding a quote into a sentence, all of the verbs that he used to introduce quotes. You know, like, "According to Nietzsche," "In Nietzsche's estimation," "Nietzsche contends," or this or that. And then I made this list. And it was amazing. He never repeated a verb, in a 40-page article—

K: That's—

H: —as he introduced quotes. So that told me, first of all, that wasn't accidental. That he had maybe written his work and then gone back and, in his revision process—I don't know how he did it, but that's the only way I could think of that, if it were me, you know, I would do that. But that was an amazing thing that he taught me. And I teach my graduate students that now. Something like that. Anything that you want to do—and in fact, I just finished teaching a seminar on academic writing, or looking at exemplary writers. And we would split the seminar—3 hours—up into talking about the content and then we'd talk about sentences. And we would actually look at sentences and how did they do that: how did the introductions, how did the structure of the thing. And it was from Charles—that looking at writing and thinking about it in that way.

[20:45]

K: Such an amazing lesson, and I like the way that you are sort of passing it on to more students.

H: Yeah, well it was the way I learned it. I mean, one of the ways. I had other teachers that were also, like Victor and Luanne Frank and Jan Swearingen. But, yeah. And speakers that came to the conferences like Susan Jarratt and Kathleen Welch and Winifred Horner and a lot of strong women. I'll mention that too. Feminism, feminist theory, in the mid- to late 80s was happening in our field. And sophistic historiography and all of that. And Jan formed a group called the Femme Critters. [both laugh]

K: I like that!

H: Yeah, it was kind of a little reading group, and we met in people's homes, you know, in different places. But the women in RSA were extremely influential on me. And I travelled to New Mexico a lot, and Jan was teaching in the summers at the Ghost Ranch doing seminars on writing and stuff. We met up one time with my first husband and her, and we went down to this monastery. But anyway, so Jan's gone now and Win's gone. So it was really good to see Kathleen Welch. But yeah. The women were—because of what was happening at that same time, that confluence, was all happening at RSA. Not at 4Cs. It was at RSA.

K: It sounds like the conference sort of was, maybe, responding to discussions instead of sticking to a party line almost?

H: Definitely. I mean, there was a focus, I'll put it this way, on, I remember—my memory is kind of hazy about specific programs and talks—but there was a lot on history. The history of rhetoric. And out of that came some of those collections that—Victor edited the one¹²—and the feminist historiography of rhetoric and things like that. So the history of rhetoric might have been, maybe, one of the first foci of RSA as they started to try to open it up or sort of define it, put boundaries around it. But then the women were bringing in [chuckles] Sappho and Sor Juana—Jan.¹³ So there were other nonrhetorician women that were being introduced into the canon, so to speak. And the canon was being questioned, and so all of that was extremely formative for me that was happening in those conferences. And then of course the back-and-forth debates with Berlin's work and Lester Faigley and Victor and the cultural leftist, Marxist criticism. That was also going on. And Berlin's work on composition theory and so forth. But that was being discussed in the RSA as well.

K: That seems like sort of a theme in what you've been telling me—of this idea of things being conversations as something that it started.

H: Yeah, definitely.

K: That's cool.

[24:54]

H: And we had a lot of conversations outside of the panels. There were, you know, receptions, gatherings. 'Cause it was a small group. And because of that we could have these—I have pictures of Jim and Victor, you know, with little plastic glasses of wine in their hands at somebody's house.

K: [laughs]

¹² I.e., Vitanza's *Writing Histories of Rhetoric*.

¹³ I.e., Jan Swearingen wrote extensively about Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's potential relevance to rhetoric and composition.

H: And that's what happened! We didn't have any money, so I remember we held this first one at this yucky—there was one of the three [conferences] held at this yucky hotel in Arlington over by Six Flags Over Texas, and I was like, "Oh my God, this is terrible!" I was in the hotel business, actually—

K: Oh really?

H: —when I first went to grad school, and I worked for Four Seasons Hotel [both laugh] which was really nice! Because the budget was very low for this. And UT-Arlington, I guess, was going in on some of it. And maybe we charged a little bit for—I don't know, I don't remember. But, so one of them was held at this, oh, really bad [both chuckle] hotel over, you know. And the food was horrible. And it didn't matter; we were all just having a good time. And the grad students were young enough that, you know, that was cool. And we were just happy to be in the same room, and I was talking to Michelle Ballif and Diane the other day, and we were reminiscing about sitting at that table, the registration table. And there are some pictures of us also sitting there having these deep conversations. I don't know who took the pictures. But we had a Gorgias Society for the grad students. That was our grad-student organization. And we—I was president of it for several years, and so was Diane and Michelle and others. And we were, you know, helping with behind the scenes of the organization. We weren't exploited or drafted into doing this for them—we wanted to. We even, in '92, put on our own conference on critical theory and Gayatri Spivak was our keynote speaker, and we had, you know, it was—but we learned from having done the RSA conference, see? That also was teaching us how to hold a conference. Just in terms of pragmatics, and protocols, and how you be a liaison with the speakers, and organization, and coordination. And that is a skill set that grad students—now, it's probably take for granted that you have some kind of service prior to getting out of grad school that you have on your CV, that you have of either coordinating or organizing or serving, you know, in some capacity for a conference. It's an important thing to know. But we wanted to. We weren't forced to do any of that. Just want to make that point.

[both laugh]

K: Yeah, and I think you are right that that sort of learning the field, but then also, like, use of learning how to put on a conference—that is not an easy thing to do.

H: No, it's not. I would never want to do it again.

K: [laughs]

H: I did one this year. It was this very small one. It was just a one-day thing but it was, you know—there's a lot of work involved. I was the faculty sponsor and the two grad students that did it did the work. But yeah, so that was an important sort of behind-the-scenes part of it. But, you know, the faculty that came, the scholars that came were—they treated us as equals. We were, like I said—Win Horner's students at TCU, and Lester Faigley's students at UT-Austin, and all of the Arlington school people, and the

Purdue people—we all knew each other. And now Lynn Worsham’s students, I mean, the way it’s all—the academic children and grandchildren, as I mentioned before. You can really see the influence of RSA among all of those people.

K: I’m trying to think of what—I think it’s the writing studies family tree?¹⁴ Have you seen that?

H: No!

K: It’s a project someone’s doing where you can put in your dissertation advisor and your title and then they will, they’re making connections between—

H: Oh, it’s like a genealogy!

K: Yeah, it is.

H: That is a cool—that’s perfect!

K: Yeah, it’s exactly what you’re describing.

[30:01]

H: Well, I had not met Kyle Jensen before, for example. And I go to hear his talk yesterday, and one of my students that I’m chairing at Clemson, she had Kyle in a class at University of North Texas and then she ends up in RCID—this is the end of her second year. And she’s going to have him as a fifth reader on her committee. So we go to hear him, and he’s asked me to contribute something to a collection, and I needed to meet him. So we’re sitting there before he starts talking, and then she was telling me about this book that’s coming out on [Kenneth] Burke’s *War of Words* that he and Jack Selzer found. And I said, “So was Jack his chair?” And she said, “No, Lynn Worsham was his chair.” I went, “That tells me all I need to know.”

K: [laughs]

H: I mean, that’s all you have to say.

K: Yeah.

H: Is, you know, you mention Eileen Schell, which is one of Lynn’s students or—and I know this goes for Cheryl Glenn and everybody else in the field. And Andrea Lunsford—‘cause Cheryl was Andrea’s [graduate student]. So everybody has this lineage, and that project sounds—I need to get plugged into that.

¹⁴ The Writing Studies Tree, a project started by graduate students and faculty at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

K: Yeah. Absolutely. I'll have to double-check on that name before you leave, so I'm not sending you down a Google hole.

[both laugh]

K: So if we're thinking about RSA, what do you foresee in the RSA's future? Or what would you like to see?

H: [takes a deep breath] Well, I would like to see a yearly conference.

K: [laughs]

H: Just 'cause it's hard to wait every two years, you know? Although I guess I've not ever been to the May summer institute. And then there's the other institutes that they have. So last year, for example, I'm in Norway when they announce my book award. And I'm like, "If I had known, I would have gone!" [laughs] But anyway, yeah, I would like to see more frequent gatherings. I know that's not easy, and it's hard work on whoever is doing it. Michelle Ballif, who's the next president, or is already the next president? I'm not sure. I guess Greg Clark's the outgoing president.

K: I'm not sure when the crown passes.

H: Anyway. Right. Michelle and Diane were having this drink the other day, and Michelle looked at both of us and: "You need to help me come up with a theme for the Portland conference in two years." And she said, "I think we're gonna do the Arlington school. We're just gonna do all theory! [both laugh] We're just gonna [H claps] blow this thing up!" Yes!

K: [laughs]

H: Now, that can be on the QT. Even though I know I'm on camera! This is on the record? Okay. But I don't know. I'm hopefully going to get to help come up with a theme. And that was fun. And maybe help plan, I don't know, if she needs me out there. So it's—the reins are being handed down to the next generation of scholars, and I think we just want to preserve that rich history and that intimacy and find a way for the growth to not affect the quality of interactions and collaborations. And I have been to some of the most amazing couple of panels—cultural rhetorics and posthumanism panels—just sort of mind-blowing because they kind of got into a brouhaha recently and then came together to start a conversation on the intersections. And then I went to a rhetoric and religion panel today. So many different— [pause] Oh my gosh! And another panel that had some speech communication rhetoric people in it, and so that's our strength: the diversity and rhetorical work that goes on. But how can we sort of maintain the history and continue to grow? That's going to be a challenge for those in charge.

K: Yeah. I was reading something the other day that was talking about rhetoric being interdisciplinary kind of all the time. And that seems to be something that you have also reflected about, both then and now.

H: I talk about it as a metadiscipline. And it sort of ticks off some of my colleagues because, to me, rhetoric informs every discipline. So I put it as the biggest umbrella possible. It's the metadiscipline under which everything sits. Because as philosophy and rhetoric, you know, have tangled for thousands of years, it's the two huge traditions that have been in conflict. But among other disciplines, it does inform because it's in part parcel about language. It's the use of language and analyzing. It's so many different things. And it isn't a convenience to try to, you know, latch onto that in order to sort of finagle your way into every discipline. That's not its purpose. It just *is*. If it's language, you're being rhetorical. I don't care if you're a scientist, I don't care if you're a philosopher, I don't care if you're a mathematician. You're coding, you're writing code; you're programming, you're writing arguments. You know?

[35:43]

K: I tell my students that rhetoric and philosophy, that they have sibling rivalry. That's how they work.

[both laugh]

H: That's a good way to put it.

K: Yeah. I think that's true. That idea of it being—that we are rhetors, and then sort of how do we do that? I'm just making sure that we hit all of the questions we needed to—

H: Yeah.

K: Are there other maybe, like, prominent memories throughout the years that you want to share? Or things that you think are important to preserve in this history?

H: I'm pretty sure I covered them all. As many as I can remember. [both chuckle] I've actually remembered more than I thought I would. I mean, as I started talking—and that's what rhetoric does, right? You never know what you think until you see what you've written or you start talking. So, it's helped to sort of—one thing led to another and I remembered more than I remember. Especially the part about the women. I didn't realize I wanted to get that part in. And I started thinking about all the women that were present and very strong. And it was important to the men. I think Kathleen Welch said something about this in that "First 25 Years" panel, that she thanked all the male feminists in our field for having been formative in helping equalize, you know, the playing field for women rhetoricians. And that is important. And I feel like, [pause] maybe with a few exceptions, most all of the men that I remember of those scholars were what I would call women-identified men. And I don't know who put the programs together. I don't remember that—I'm sure it was Charles for those three years I was

involved. And maybe there was a committee of other faculty people, I don't know. But because of those women who were there, who were a big part of it, and because of the women graduate students, and people like Lynn Worsham and others, [pause] we see that now. We see the result of that. And Kathleen spoke to that.

K: I think it's also an important point. I'm glad you pointed that out. And I think that they were there, and they were foundational, and they've always been presented as such.

H: Yep. Right, right. Susan Miller. I mean, women that are coming to my mind that aren't here with us anymore. So, yeah.

K: That's wonderful. Well thank you so much.

H: You're welcome. Thanks for doing this. This is a great project.