

Midd Points

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Tom Beyer: Russian

Tom Beyer, the oldest of seven children, was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. After graduating from high school, he went on to the School of Languages at Georgetown University, where he earned a B.S. with a major in Russian and a minor in German in 1969.

After Georgetown, Tom went on to do graduate work at the University of Kansas, but his studies were interrupted in 1970 when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He was trained to be a combat engineer and demolitions expert, and then went on to be a paratrooper. Tom was eventually stationed in Germany, where he became involved in community work "because I spoke German," he notes.

In January of 1972 his tour of duty ended, and Tom returned to Kansas, where he earned an M.A., and in 1974, a Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literature. In 1973, Tom married his wife Dorothea, whom he had met while he was in Germany. The couple has three daughters, Carina, Stefanie and Alexandra.

After a one-year teaching stint at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Tom applied for a position at Middlebury. At the time, the academic job market was tight, and Tom says he was delighted to be offered a job. "It was then, and I think even now, a dream place for someone who wanted to be involved in languages," he observes.

That was in 1975, and Tom has been here ever since. In addition to being a Professor of Russian, Tom has worn many hats along the way and has been Director of Russian and Soviet Studies; Chair of the Foreign Languages Division; and Dean of the Russian School, to mention just a few positions he has held. He is currently chair of the Russian Department and a Faculty Associate in the Admissions Office. "I do a little bit of everything that goes on in the Admissions Office," he says.

But his first love on campus is his teaching. "I don't think one can do this without enjoying one's students first and foremost, and there has never been a day or a class where I have regretted my decision to be an educator," he maintains. "I teach Russian primarily to first year students, but I also love to teach at the other end—the seniors—where you get to see how much progress they've made from those first, hesitant efforts."

For 15 of the last 20 years, Tom was closely allied with the Language Schools, and he says that this association gave him a broader view of the campus and how it functions. "I gained a real sense of the staff efforts that keep this College up and running," he notes. "I have been particularly privileged to work with a number of people all across the board—the deans, residential life, catering and food service, the sports complex—it's been a really wonderful opportunity for me to participate in that Middlebury community."

Tom and his family live in Middlebury. At the community level, Tom is active on the Mary Hogan School Board. But his main pleasure, when he is not at work, is to be at home. "I enjoy my family," he declares. "Whatever they happen to be interested in, I enjoy watching those interests grow, whether it's soccer or swimming or piano playing. I try to spend quality time with my family."

Although originally a city boy, Tom is pleased to be a small-town resident. "It's been a wonderful place to live and a wonderful place to raise our children," he declares.

Greg Pahl