The limited screen of our video camera failed to capture the energy of the dynamic Dr. Manfred J. Enssle, the movement of his stories requiring more view than a fixed camera could allow. The shot somehow seemed more appropriate to Fred’s whimsical nature when his German shepherd Bison ambled jovially through the frame.

Growing up in Stuttgart, Germany, Fred brought mischievous life to the Christian/humanist boarding school he attended, pulling pranks that convinced his older brother that he needed a change. Fred arrived in America in 1954 at age fifteen, with his older brother as his guardian. However, thanks to his book-loving Aunt Sofie and the unique worldview of his boarding school, Fred had already been liberated to consider more than the socially acceptable family trade of tanning. He had begun to love history and philosophy.

Still, Fred’s life was by no means strictly academic. In high school, his jobs included picking blueberries, stacking papers for the local newspaper, setting pins in the bowling alley, and selling ladies’ shoes. Though he claims he was not a good high school student, Fred explains, “In addition to being a German American, I have a cosmopolitan worldview because of Karl May,” whose books he devoured. This cosmopolitan perspective continued into his undergraduate studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder, where he switched his major from business to political science before finally coming to rest on history. He pursued that course of study to a master’s and a PhD, both from CU. Even at the university, Fred’s life was a collage of interests. Fred worked many jobs, including waiting on tables, surveying, and dishwashing, while also participating in the cosmopolitan club, the soccer team, and the international club. His room was known among friends as “Fred’s Closet” because it was the cheapest room for rent on campus, at fourteen dollars a month.

Between earning his master’s and his PhD, Fred was offered a job teaching history at Fort Collins High School. The quirks that made him a prankster as a student had not dissolved by the time Fred became a teacher. His students, as well as his co-workers, loved him, although there were some moments of exasperation. Laughing gleefully, Fred recalls a staff meeting when his principle announced, “Discipline in this school is out of control! This morning, Ned Nelson rolled down the hall in a barrel. And Fred opened his door and just laughed!” Fred also recounts dressing up with fellow teachers to play the drums in a rendition of “A Hard Day’s Night.” He returned to a classroom of students cheering, “Ringo!” “I liked being a teacher – very much,” Fred declared. “It was my calling.”

As he was finishing his PhD, Fred was recommended for a “temporary instructor” position at CSU. One reason he accepted the job was his realization that his high school students would never be able to grasp the depths of the “intellectual history” that truly thrilled him. He remembers teaching a course on historiography at CSU. “The most boring class in the department,” he stated bluntly. “The students hated it.” Still, with typical Fred flair, he brought life to the lecture. He led his class to a demonstration being conducted in front of CSU President Bill Morgan by the African American students on campus. He then trained his students to experience the recording of history by instructing them to each write their own accounts.

Fred’s forty-two year experience at CSU was studded with professional achievement. He was accepted into the prestigious Institute of European History in
Mainz, Germany, becoming the American representative. Out of this experience, Fred determined the topic for his dissertation. “We're talking about the world’s most boring dissertation,” Fred declares. “German diplomatic relations with Belgium in the 1920’s.” Considerably less dull is Fred’s chapter in the official published history of Stuttgart.

Also through the Institute, Fred began to embrace more politically radical ideas. In describing his radical perspective, Fred summarizes, “It’s a left, progressive position. It means generosity towards those not as fortunate as you.” Practically, in Fred’s words, this meant, “I was gonna be one heck of a good teacher if I could.”

Dr. Fred Enssle can list professional achievements, advanced theory, and historical happenings. He can aptly comment on the condition of American society: “Americans can’t lose arguments. Abortion – can’t lose that argument. Gays – can’t lose that argument.” Still, at the end of it all, Fred asserts, “To me the big issue was the condition of the students... My door was always open.”