

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University
Cindy LaCom Interview
March 23, 2023
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MJ: All right. And I believe I need to introduce the day and time. So it is Thursday, March 23rd, 2023, about 9:54 a.m. and I'm here interviewing Dr. Cindy LaCom about their time in the Gender Studies Program. Okay. So I've got my question list. First of all, could I get some biographical information, like name, date of birth, where from originally, things like that.

CL: Okay. My name is Cindy LaCom. I was born in 1961 in Los Angeles. I grew up, though, in the East Bay Area in California. So Castro Valley, not San Francisco, not the sexy city, but a suburb of it.

MJ: Yeah.

CL: And I spent most of my youth there until I left for college at eighteen.

MJ: Mm-hmm. And where did you get your education?

CL: I got my undergraduate—I got a B.A. in English and Philosophy from California State University, Chico. And then I stayed there for my Master's. So, undergrad degrees were in English and philosophy, and I got my master's in English. And then I went to the University of Oregon in Eugene for my Ph.D., which was a great experience. I loved Eugene; I loved Oregon. I kind of felt like I had come back to a home there because the vibe and the culture was really cool.

MJ: And what was your Ph.D. in?

CL: I got my Ph.D. in English, and I was a British Victorianist, so I studied 19th century culture. And I have had people say like, “How did you end up going from that to gender studies?” But the dissertation proper actually focused on women writers, because I was very interested in, from a feminist perspective, the ways in which women writers in British lit have been kind of silenced and excluded from the canon. And then I was interested in the intersections of sexuality, disability and maternity. So I focused on novels that examined those intersections. I think for me, you know, I'd already been doing work in disability studies. It didn't even have a name yet. We kind of coined that name at a conference in 1992. But I think I've always been interested in embodiment and the kind of cultural meanings that are imposed upon different kinds of bodies. And that's something that has carried me forward into gender studies.

MJ: Okay. And what experience did you have with gender and feminist issues (this kind of bleeds into that, because you were just talking about your Ph.D.) before coming to SRU?

CL: Well, I was involved with NARAL, which is a national—the National Abortion Rights Action League. I got involved with them when I was in graduate school, and I ultimately became president of the Eugene chapter. So I was deeply involved in that. And then in Eugene, there was a ballot measure eight. And the goal of that was to essentially—in some ways, we're back to where we're at. It was to say that if you were a K through 12 public school teacher, you couldn't be gay, in essence. And if you were an ally and you were out about that, you risked losing your job. So I got involved in that campaign. I acted as a media spokesperson for that. And then I was also deeply involved in a feminist theory reading group on campus. So I had a lot of things, I was taking a lot of courses in like feminist queer theory. So a lot of my experiences kind of prepared me, I think, for this job. That was before I got here. And when I got here, I can talk about some of the things that I got involved in.

MJ: And you've mentioned in other interviews that you had a pretty diverse group of friends when you were there.

CL: Yeah, I mean, again, the Bay Area was already pretty diverse. It's not like some of the small towns that I know exist in western Pennsylvania. Because of my work in disability justice—at the time, we called it disability activism—I had a number of friends who had disabilities. I was really interested in bodies that are kind of liminal, right? The idea of moving in and out of disability or illness. I had begun presenting at the Society for Disability Studies in 2000. I was one of twenty-five people invited to an NEH--National Endowment for the Humanities --five-week program on disability studies. And so I created lifelong relationships with people who were there, many of whom have disabilities. I've also been, I hope, I think, an advocate for what we today called Black Lives Matter. And so a number of my friends were nonwhite. And because I was really involved in queer issues, a lot of my friends identified as lesbian, bisexual, or gay.

MJ: And as for your affiliation with Slippery Rock, like, did you attend as a student at all, or if not, when were you hired?

CL: I was hired in '92.

MJ: Mm-hmm.

CL: And, you know, again, when I got here, I'm going to be very honest, I was really happy to take this job. I loved that the faculty were organized; I loved that we had a union. I liked that we had a ski lodge on campus, and a lot of things about this campus actually reminded me of Chico. I also really liked that we had what was then called a Women's Studies Committee. I got involved in that immediately. I attended those meetings, but I also worked like in my first few years with a group of students that did something fascinating. They went into classrooms, they would ask to be invited into classrooms, and they did these presentations on diversity issues. And this was twenty-seven years ago. So I've kind of been involved, I've been an advisor to Stop Human Trafficking. I've been an advisor to the College Dems. I've been an advisor to the Gender Studies Club. So in terms of student involvement, I think I've long been involved in activism that focuses on diversity.

MJ: And what position were you originally hired for?

CL: I was hired as an assistant professor in the English Department to teach English. In that department, everybody teaches what was the equivalent of College Writing One and Two, what is today Critical Reading and Writing. And then my other courses were mostly Brit[ish] Lit[erature] Two, which is Victorian 18-19th century. I was really lucky to get to teach the Literary Theory course. Because of my degree, I think, in philosophy, I was already primed to teach theory and to know theory. Really demanding course, incredibly difficult. And I loved it; I love teaching that class. And I taught a bunch of other stuff. I mean, I taught World Lit, I taught 18th Century Lit, but really, 19th Century Lit, Writing, Reading and Theory were probably my main focus.

MJ: Okay. And let's see, you were here after Slippery Rock transitioned to a university. So, you sort of missed that particular change, right?

CL: Yeah, that happened before I got here.

MJ: Okay. And did the department you were hired into change in the time you've been here, and if so, how?

CL: Well, again, it's weird to answer that because I've been out of the English Department for over a decade now. But it did change. I mean, I think that in some interesting ways it is now a whole new department. It merged with what was Modern Languages and Cultures. And I think for this department--we had a Master's program when I came in. I was really fortunate to get to teach in the Master's program in English, and that underwent—it went on hiatus for a while. It came back. It's now focused on professional writing. So I think the department changed, and one of the things that I think has happened to that department, retrospectively, has happened to a lot of departments, which is that they have been challenged by a failure to give them tenure track lines when a tenure track faculty retires. That's a change I think a lot of universities are dealing with. It's--it's tough.

MJ: And what about once you transitioned to, I believe it was called the Women's Studies Department at that time, how has that changed?

CL: Yeah, and we've never been a department. We are a program. And I'm now actually, I teach out of the Department of Nonprofit Management, Empowerment and Diversity Studies, formerly Interdisciplinary Studies. My first couple of years, I actually stayed in the English Department, so I was teaching Gender Studies, I was the Gender Studies director, but I was still in that department. And at some point, I knew I wanted to create a concentration in Gender and Diversity Studies, and the only department in which I could do that was Interdisciplinary Studies. So I made the transition, which was profound for me. I mean, I left a homeland, which was awesome. I loved being in the English Department, and I'm really happy in this department now, but it was a necessary transition. I had dreamt about creating a concentration that students could actually major in Gender and Diversity Studies. I wanted to grow the minor, which was happening, so that was an interesting change. And in my home department now, we've

undergone a lot of transitions, I think going from Interdisciplinary Programs to Nonprofit Management, Empowerment and Diversity Studies speaks to the role that diversity plays in our curriculum. Our faculty are really knowledgeable. So this—this has been a really interesting transition for me.

MJ: And what about the transition from the name Women's Studies to Gender Studies and that time?

CL: Yeah, that happened, has probably been—it happened within two or three years after I took over. And one of my concerns with the Women's Studies is that, here's the thing, women are still deeply, deeply oppressed. That's even more true for women of color. It's even more true for disabled women. It's more true for women who are queer. But we only were getting women. I mean, when I came in, we had only women minors, right? And I kept thinking, wait a second, gender is culturally constructed. It is intersectional. And so my first recommendation to the committee was that we do Gender and Queer Studies, and ten years ago people said, I don't think that will go well. I don't think students will declare a major or minor. So we decided to do Gender Studies. Um, and I have since thought a lot about it. What is it that this department does? Intersectionality is two things: it's still unknown, and it's become a word that has in some ways been demonized, right? By very conservative people. And I think that's a bummer because we really are looking at gender, diversity, and intersectionality. So that's—if I was, you know, ruler of the universe, that's probably what I would like to call the program, but I'm not. It's made by committee consensus.

MJ: And now, what buildings have you worked in? Have you always been in Spotts [World Culture Building]?

CL: I have lived in this building since my first day here. And for a period of time, the Gender Studies office was moved into the Smith Student Center. And the idea then was that we would create better connections with student-centered organizations, which, I mean, the Gender Studies Program has always done that. We've had almost seventy co-partners in our programming on and off campus, but I think it just symbolically made a lot of sense. And then there were some shifts up in the Smith Student Center and how that space was allocated. And so for a period of time, I was in Patterson [Hall], and that was great. I love that department. I teach in Patterson. I wanted in some ways to separate the program from a particular department and that allowed me to do it. And again, this is just one of the things that happens on campuses. A department took over those offices and so now I'm back in Spotts.

MJ: Okay. And what departments did Patterson Hall host at that time? What do they host now?

CL: Well, I don't know all of the departments. I mean, you know, what I know is that I was in the hallway with Recreation Therapy and Parks Management, which was awesome for me. They became my adoptive family, and I loved the people that I worked with. It also allowed me to work primarily with Becky Thomas, and we did a number of programs on things like food deserts. We did a program on food insecurity. We did programs on environmental racism. So it gave me this opportunity to collaborate with people I might not otherwise have worked with.

MJ: All right. And when you first got here coming from Eugene, what was your first impression? What was it like when you first got here?

CL: I'd been in two very liberal places. We moved to New Castle. It was terrifying. I got [to] this campus; it seemed like almost everybody was white. I knew already—I mean, when we first moved here, we went to the county fair, Lawrence County Fair. Have I told you about this?

MJ: Tell me again.

CL: All right, I'll tell you again. I went, and my partner, who is a guy and presents as pretty cisgender, but he had a tie dye shirt on and shorts and Birkenstocks--big deal. And we got stared at. It was wild for me. But the other thing that happened was there was a water dunking booth and there's a little girl, maybe thirteen, and a guy was throwing the beanbags to try to dunk her. And after the third or fourth try, she said something to the effect of, "Come on, what's the matter? Are you a...?" And she called him the F-word. And I honest to God, I think my head snapped back. I looked around like, *what was going to happen?* And there was no response at all from the other people who were there. And Peter and I looked at each other like, *what have we done?* I mean, honestly, what have we done? So my first week was really wild. I did have deep concerns. It was a culture shock. I've never seen so many churches or cemeteries, but what I loved immediately was that my students, they've always been super open-minded about difference and about diversity. I think they've always appreciated this opportunity to meet people who are really different than them. That made me feel like I was at home. I loved teaching at Slippery Rock from the moment I got here.

MJ: And what changes have you witnessed both in the area and at the university, and are they for the better or worse?

CL: In the area of western Pennsylvania, I feel that we are still pretty conservative. I was thrilled at the most recent election outcome; I thought that was a beacon of hope for me. I think I've probably seen more changes at Slippery Rock than I have in my hometown or western Pennsylvania more generally. I think there's a really different kind of attitude towards LGBTQIA+ issues. Awesome. I think we are a little bit more open in terms of race. I'm seeing less systemic racism on our campus, but I also think we are having Black faculty and staff leave this university because they feel in many cases it's not a warm and inviting climate. And so our numbers in terms of faculty of color haven't really changed in thirty years, and I think that's a problem. [Pause] I think we need to do a better job of really reaching out to students who might be marginalized or oppressed. And I don't know that we've done that as well as we could. But generally I think students here are moving along with national trends, which is your generation is more accepting about a whole bunch of different things than previous generations.

MJ: So could you remind me what year you arrived here, like with the county fair incident?

CL: '93.

MJ: Now, what activities did you participate in on campus, like committees and organizations, things like that?

CL: Well, I joined the President's Commission on Women. I was on the Gender Studies--what was the Women's Studies--Committee, and then in the department, I joined everything because I wanted to get promoted. I had a couple advisors, I mean, I had mentors. So I was really lucky. I had great mentors in the English Department and two or three of them in particular said, "Get involved at the department level, get involved at the university level." So I joined a lot of different committees. I worked with Colleen Cooke and Deb Hutchins. Both of them were committed to issues of disability justice. And, you know, I can't remember when, but we created a proposal that we sent to the then-President, Bob Smith, to create a commission on disability issues, and he immediately approved it. So I was a member of that for a while. I'm an ex-officio member of the President's Commission on Gender Identity, Expression and Sexual Orientation. So I've been on three commissions. I don't know. I mean, my God, I feel like I need to have my curriculum--my CV in front of me. But a lot of different committees. I mean, again, a student I was working with years ago, he was trans and he came to me and he said, "We don't have bathrooms that I can use." He was a real activist. I just have great respect for him. He said, "I've tried to get this something to change and it's not working." So I went to the Title IX Director and I said, "We need to convene a committee on trans issues." So that happened and the student was an advocate on that and it took a long time, but we now have a lot of non-gender bathrooms. And then again, I worked with a student who I'm still really good friends with, who uses a wheelchair and has a disability. And when she was a student here, she had to come to campus every day, get to the library, get a key for all the—all the elevators on campus, return those keys at the end of the day. And there was one point where Spotts' elevator was broken and the elevator in the library was broken, so she couldn't get to her classes. She was a--she's a self-advocate, she didn't need anybody, but I started attending meetings with her to try to get that changed and through her fierceness, really, but my kind of standing by saying, "I work here," that changed. So, you know, what I would actually say is a lot of times, I think a single student or a small group of students has the capacity to change policy. And I just get to be kind of a bystander advocate for them.

MJ: And let's see, what organizations are you involved with more recently? Are you the advisor for Young Progressives?

CL: No, it's interesting. No, I've worked with them last semester on a panel on abortion and reproductive justice. I advised the Gender Studies Club. Again, I advised Project to End Human Trafficking. I was advisor to RockOUT for five years with a colleague and a friend of mine who's retired, Sharon Sykora, which was awesome. I think we actually inaugurated the drag shows under our advisorship. I'm on the President's Commission on GIESO, the President's Commission on Women. I'm on the APSCUF (Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties) Social Justice Committee. These are all ex officio positions. I'm on the Middle East Studies Committee. I've done that for about eight years. And then in the department, I'm on Assessment, Curriculum, a number of different committees.

MJ: What was the first commission? President's Commission on. . . .

CL: GIESO, that's the Gender Identity, Expression, Sexual Orientation. Yeah, that's the acronym.

MJ: Okay. And what accomplishments have you accomplished at Slippery Rock over your time here?

CL: I'm very—I'm really kind of introspective at this point as I'm moving towards retirement. That's a really good question. I don't know. I mean, you know what I would say the biggest accomplishment is, is when I get an email from a student who graduated two years ago. I just got an email recently from a student who left, graduated eight years ago, and reached out to me and said, "I just want you to know that a class I had with you changed the way I work in the world." I had a meeting a couple of weeks ago with a woman. I said, "Your name sounds familiar." It had nothing to do with Slippery Rock. And she said, "My husband was a student of yours in a Brit Lit class, and he has talked about you." And this isn't my, only my ego. What I really think for me is, my biggest accomplishment is the opportunity to be in the classroom. And I can tell you, I mean, it's not just like I'm giving information to the students. Two days ago in my Intro [to] Gender Studies class, we had a conversation that blew me away. And at one point somebody said something that so surprised me in terms of his perspective that I actually said, "Oh my God, you're kidding me." And I've been thinking about that ever since. We had a class discussion last night, Gender Studies and Porn Culture, where we're talking about mitigated autonomy in a pornographic culture, and we're talking about Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which you probably know about, and the way in which it allows people—companies that post content to remain--what's the word I want to say? That they're not liable for lawsuits, so that if they're posting, for instance, nonconsensual online porn, it's really difficult to prosecute because they didn't create the content. They're just posting it. And it raises questions about how do you measure motive? How do you say, this person meant to harm me when they uploaded sexts? So I got to drive home last night with my brain just kind of going, *bing, bing, bing, bing*. So I think my greatest accomplishment is that I have been lucky enough to participate in learning environments that have been awesome.

MJ: Now, what have been your best and worst teaching moments in the last thirty years?

CL: I have mostly best teaching moments. I love being in a classroom. I love the environment that occurs. There are not very many that have been crappy. There was, there are two that I can remember. One was a class which I won't name, it was an early morning class, discussion never happened, and it was exhausting to me. And I remember thinking, because most of my classes are discussion based, *what is it like to come here every day and teach 150 students or more a semester and not like it?* And I cannot imagine, it's so psychically challenging even if you love it. I can't imagine if I didn't. And then I had one class where—it was weird. The students—it was a class I really adored. It became very obvious that they hadn't done the reading. And I finally said, "How many of you actually did the reading?" And out of thirty, maybe seven or eight raised their hands. And I don't do a lot of guilt tripping, because I don't think it's a good pedagogical approach. But I put my hands on the desk and I said, "This is unacceptable and I'm frankly disappointed in you, and this class is over and I would make this request, don't come back if you haven't done the reading." And that was a class, when I left, I remember both feeling like I've just used shame as a pedagogical tool and that's crappy. Well, it did work. But the other thing, it was just—it was disappointing for me. I could have actually cried when I left that classroom. That remains in my memory.

MJ: Any other best teaching moments you could think of?

CL: Yeah, there are a lot, my God. One was, and I may have talked with you about this before, but I was teaching a Brit Lit class, and you know those course evaluations, which is what did you do to fulfill your obligations, and then what worked in the classroom. And I was reading them, they're anonymous, and I read one from a student, I don't know who it was. And all that this person wrote was, "You told me that I'm smart." And I've had imposter phenomena most of my life. Intellectually, I've always been waiting for someone to discover that I'm dumb." So that totally spoke to me. I thought, *oh my God*, I know what a difference that can make to have someone believe in you. And the other, I was teaching a literary theory course, and I told the students—this was way before a lot of technology was available, we didn't have smartphones that I could record—but I said, "I carry paper and pen with me when I do my morning hikes with my dogs, and I'll often stop on the hike specifically thinking about this class, and I'll write down something. I'll write down notes." And at the end of the class, the students chipped in—God, it was amazing—and they bought me an instrument where I could—it was portable and I could record myself at any moment and bring it home with me. And when they gave it to me, again, I said like—I cry all the time, but I just, *oh my God*. I was overwhelmed. And I did start crying. But then I've had wonderful students. I mean, this is a mug I just got for Christmas from a student who's a major. And I don't know if you can see it, but it's a uterus. There are uteruses all over this cup. And I think, wow, that's awesome. So I have a lot of great teaching moments. I'm in a great position that I can't pick out one or two.

MJ: Good. And circling back to accomplishments really quickly, I was more thinking of the type of things that you would put on a CV, like going from, you know, tenure track to like associate to full professor, things like that.

CL: I mean, there are articles that I've published, I've done over one hundred conference presentations. I mean, you know, probably some of the conferences I've helped organize. I was on the Committee for Disability Issues with the Modern Language Association, and I was lucky enough—it's a huge, MLA (Modern Language Association) is gigantic. It's English's biggest conference and professional organization. And I was part of a committee that organized our first conference, which was a pretty amazing thing. When I was in graduate school, I organized the first British Women Writers' Conference. It's been almost thirty years. It's now an international conference. Two years ago, I worked with Emily Keener in the Psych[ology] Department, and we organized the Women's Consortium Conference on our campus during COVID, during quarantine. Smashing success. It was awesome. So I think in some ways, creating opportunities, especially for student scholars to present their work and the others—really, I don't put this on my resume, but we've probably had thirty Gender Studies minors and majors present their work at state, regional and national conferences. And that, that's amazing to me. Yeah.

MJ: Now, when you arrived up to now, who were the leaders, like the people who'd been here forever, the movers and shakers. And what did you think of them?

CL: Again, I was lucky. I got here, I was taken under the wings of a couple of people. One was Jace Condrary; she's the former director of the Women's Studies Program. She and I remain really good friends. She was a mover and a shaker. She also at some point became the president of our union and she again was fearsome, right? And she presents as kind of quiet and a little bit subdued. Bullshit; she's none of those things.

Neil Cosgrove in the English Department was another mentor to me. He encouraged me; he supported me; he believed in me. He went on—he was a department chair. He was a co-author of our Middle States Committee reports for a number of years. And he also was deeply involved in our union, was union [treasurer and an active member of the Grievance Committee when chaired by Sharon Sykora].

Bill Williams was another guy. He was president of our union. He was department chair. He encouraged me to apply for the director for Honors Program. I would never have thought to do it without him. He went on to become a provost in that position. He and I often butted heads over financial support for my program. But there are a lot of people, Rachela Permenter in my department, Jim Strickland, Diana Dreyer, who again, they all held key leadership roles. A lot of them were doing work in the union.

MJ: How long were you director of the Honors Program?

CL: Seven years.

MJ: Okay.

CJ: Yeah. And that was an experience. I mean, not to—again, I mean, when I came in, the program had had a director, they'd been gone. There were thirteen people in the program, and when I left, there were three hundred students in the program. We had Honors scholarships. We had Honors housing. I served on the national board (National Collegiate Honors Council) and on an ad hoc committee, and I was president of the regional National Honors Council. So I was lucky enough to again move into a lot of leadership roles.

MJ: Now, as for leaders, when you first arrived here, like who was the president in '93, who was the dean, things like that.

CL: Chuck Zuzak was my dean and Bob Aebersold was our president. And they were lovely, lovely people. It's very interesting, I have an archival memory now of different presidents, deans, and provosts. I think Bob Aebersold was the perfect president for the time. He was local. Everybody knew him. He was well-liked. But again, the jobs of what a president or a provost do are really different now.

I have to say in my thirty years, one of the best upper administrators I've worked with was Bob Smith. And I, I think like any administrator, some people liked him and some people did not. But what I said about Bob was, he never, he never made me a promise he couldn't keep, and he didn't make a promise if he didn't believe he could keep it. So we had a very open relationship.

I thought he was a great provost and then he was hired as president. And I was sad to see him go.

MJ: All right. And other people who influenced you or were significant in your time here and why?

CL: Well, you know, right now, I mean, in some ways it was very interesting. My first ten to fifteen years, I was mentored by a lot of very powerful people. I think the people now who have probably influenced me--and I think that's reciprocal--I work a lot with Emily Keener. She is a leader in diversity, equity, inclusion on campus. Christine Pease-Hernandez is an amazing person. I've been lucky enough to work a lot with Ursula Payne out of our Dance Department. She's now holding an administrative position. She was a director of the Frederick Douglass Institute, and she and I did some great programming together. I think that--God, I don't want to forget anybody who's really been in the thick of things with diversity things. When Sharon Sykora was here in Political Science, I thought that she was a mentor to me, and a friend, and an ally. So those are the key, those really are the key folks.

MJ: Okay. And while you were here, major events and activities both on campus and just international, like news, sort of.

CL: That I was part of?

MJ: Yes, that you were part of or that you witnessed.

CL: Wow. Okay. That I was part of: I became involved in what was then called Stop Porn Culture. It's now called Culture Reframed. Gail Dines, whose book *Pornland*, is probably one of the most important in porn studies. I went to a conference that was in her hometown in Boston, really was profoundly--my world was shaken by that. And Katie Cooklin was the one who recommended that I go to this conference. I went a second year and then Gail and I began having conversations and she invited me to be part of the executive board for that. And I did that for five years. That has had a huge impact on how I understand the world, because I think that we live--pornography is the wallpaper of a lot of our lives, whether we know that or not. And that's especially true for people under the age of thirty.

Some of the other things that--the other things more recently, I'm involved in a think tank on restorative justice. I'm on the executive committee for Voices for Juvenile Justice. And the last three years, I've had this incredible opportunity to understand how broken our criminal justice system is. And the other thing that's happened in the last years was that I was invited to join a board whose mission is to end homelessness. It's the Western Pennsylvania Continuums of Care, which doesn't sound like--what does that have to do with homelessness? But they are working in a twenty-county region in western Pennsylvania. And so again, I've been lucky enough to integrate experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity, and the ways in which, I mean, working with returning citizens, working with veterans, working with people with disabilities, working with low-income people, you really almost can't, you can't separate any of those things. So disability discrimination, vulnerability to homelessness, vulnerability to substance abuse and addiction, all of these things come together. And in some really weird way,

I think the idea of intersectionality has become lived for me in the last ten years in ways that it wasn't before. Internationally, Black Lives Matter. I would like to say the MeToo movement; I'm waiting to see the outcome of that. My concern is that what we know in the wake of the overturning of Roe [Roe vs. Wade, 410 U.S. 113], Wyoming's governor just tried to impose a ban on the morning-after pill. I think one of the things I'm witnessing that terrifies me is a kind of conservative extremism. And I think anyone who says that women aren't in danger, I feel like we are living in a culture and a country right now where systemic racism and systemic misogyny are thriving. And that freaks me out. It's terrifying to me.

MJ: And was this like, less present before you came to campus, or how has that changed?

CL: Well, when I was involved in NARAL, right? Our goal was to protect abortion rights and reproductive justice. And I was involved, and I did clinic escorts, right? So the clinic, one of the clinics in Eugene, when people would go there, there were protesters. And a group of us would wear our little orange vests. We got training, and we would escort people who were going to the clinic, right? So there was definitely a sense thirty years ago that Roe could be threatened. But like many feminists, I was naive enough to think that it will never really be overturned. I just feel like, whether it's anti-trans measures that I'm now seeing, like what the hell? Anti-LGBTQ things. I mean, I do believe same sex marriage is threatened now, federal protections of that. I just think that abortion is a touchstone for me. And I think when I came here, we didn't talk about abortion. We always dropped our voices. But there was probably an understanding that it was accessible, it would remain legal, it would remain safe. So in some very strange ways, this campus was, and this campus and our country was probably more progressive five years ago.

MJ: Even that short a time ago?

CL: Mm-hmm. Because I'll tell you the other thing that I think has happened is that we're seeing this terrifying uptick in white nationalism and white supremacy. And I never used to worry, if I had a program, for instance, that anybody would bring a weapon into my program. I never sat in a classroom or in this office and thought I could be a victim of gun violence, especially given my program, the programming we do, the curriculum that we cover. I just talked to my mom this morning on my way to campus and she said, "Be careful on campus. Did you read about the high school student who just shot two teachers?" And I said, "Yes, I did." And I said, "I never would have thought five years ago that I would finish my career (without being histrionic) thinking—I just want to be able to wrap up my career without a mass shooting or a shooting on our campus." That's a seismic shift.

MJ: Mm-hmm. Now, other memorable events. I was especially thinking of things on campus, like other—I've been reading through other interviews and they discuss building projects, for instance. So more like, localized?

CL: For me?

MJ: Yes.

CL: This is hard. There's a lot of different things that I, I mean, one of the things I wasn't part of it, but I love that we have Take Back the Night marches. I've been going to most of those. I've attended those; I've supported those. Tell me more about what you—what you're asking about.

MJ: Yeah, some people. . . . You might not have been there for a lot of this, but I've been reading interviews from like Bob Watson, Bill Williams, and they mentioned seeing the campus sort of like spring up around them because they came in the 'seventies.

CL: Oh. . . .

MJ: Was it more—like, in terms of buildings, was it like more—closer to the way it is now?

CL: Oh my God, no. Thirty years ago, no. In fact, there were two things I can tell you. Again, kind of touchstones. It was a really rural, very small campus. And then we got the \$17 million budget to build the residence life halls and the—the ski lodge has always been here, but like the Bat House and the thing out in the back of campus. Founders Hall, which is where the Honors director office was originally housed, it's not even there anymore. It was a dump, by the way. So I think the changes happened slowly enough.

A colleague of mine came out from Washington. She and I went through a Ph.D. program together. We were both Victorianists. We're really good friends. And she was doing a presentation in Pittsburgh, so they invited her out to do a keynote and she wanted to come up and spend a couple days here. I said, "Sure, this should be awesome." We were driving to campus and I said, "I need to tell you, it's a—*it's a pretty small campus. It's a pretty white campus. It's a fairly homogenous campus, but it's really cool. Students are awesome. My colleagues are great.*" So we got to campus and I said, "You want to just do a driving tour?" And she said "Sure." And we drove back and the residence life buildings were there, and the new buildings were here, and the new student center was here. And there were all these different students and we saw a same sex couple holding hands and we saw somebody who's trans. And she looked at me and said, "Were you pulling my leg?" And I said, "No." To see it through her eyes. . . . You know, when change is so gradual, you almost stop seeing it? That was a really interesting moment for me, because what I thought is, *we really have grown in terms of space, but also in terms of campus culture.* So yeah, it's almost unrecognizable.

MJ: In a good way?

CL: In a good way. Yeah, I think it's good.

MJ: All right. What, if anything, are you going to miss about being at SRU?

CL: A lot. I can tell you what I'll miss most. And this semester, with four classes that I just absolutely love, and that's after a career of really loving most of my classes, I will miss being in the classroom. I will miss the students. Every morning when I go through all my news feeds and I'll think, *oh, I need to send this to my students, or oh, I want to send that, that conversation I had yesterday. Yeah, she's really interested in.* . . . *Oh, that's right. This person and I were talking about.* . . . And so I'll send individual emails. I spend two hours every morning

answering emails, sending stuff out, and I, I've thought about that. When will the day come when I read something and I don't immediately think, *oh, I need to share this with my students?* And that, that makes me sad. I will miss the students. I hope I stay in touch with them. I have great colleagues. I'll miss my colleagues, and my hope is that for many of them, we'll remain friends. But I will probably untether myself pretty immediately from the political issues on campus. I think I just need to, to move on. I think there might be a day or two where I'll miss this office. You know? This is home to me—being in Spotts is a second home. But I have to tell you, when we went into quarantine, we had one last day to come in and get what we needed from our offices. And I pulled up--I was the only car on campus that I could see--and I came into Spotts. All the lights were off. No one was here. I came in and got my books that I thought I might need; got the stuff I thought I might need. And I left, and I took a walk around campus, and we didn't know, right, when we'd be back. And it was very emotional for me, because I felt like I said a first goodbye. And actually in hindsight, I think that was the moment that helped me prepare emotionally for retirement.

MJ: Wow.

CL: Yeah.

MJ: All right. Last question here. Any words of wisdom for current or future community members here?

CL: Yeah. Get involved. Whether you're a student or faculty or staff member, there is some really great work being done. I would say seek it out. I would say, if you are committed to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, make that your passion. I think about a TED Talk I watched, we watched it in my Disability and Social Justice class and the guy who is a disability justice advocate, he said, "Find your misery, find your mission. Figure out what pisses you off, and that's your mission." I've already said I believe students have the capacity to change this campus culture. I think that, that students are going to have to really need that passion, and that social justice warriors are going to have a big fight in front of them. I think some of that depends on our new [university] president, who I hope will bring a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and creating a sense of belonging for all of our students. But if you see something that's not happening, make it happen. That's my advice.

MJ: All right. And that's all I have for questions. Thank you very much.

CL: Yeah, thank you.