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Carol Christ Interview: Paula Fass and Christina Maslach, "Academic Pioneers: Women at Berkeley in the 1970s and 1980s." Interviews with Berkeley's pioneering women professors, Berkeley, CA. Conducted 2019-2023.

Christina Maslach:

We want to start the interview with a few demographics like name, birth, your early education.

Carol Christ:

My name is Carol Tecla Christ; I was born on May 21, 1944. My parents were in the Army during World War II. My mother was an Army nurse. My father was a Lieutenant and they had met in Palm Springs. I used to joke when I first came to California that I was conceived in California. They eloped from their base to get married in San Francisco. They got married in Grace Cathedral.

And then, they went to the St. Francis Hotel to try to find a room for the night, but there were no rooms at the inn, and they slept out in the hall. My mother was given an honorable discharge and went back to Astoria, my father was shipped overseas. He fought in the war in India. They always thought that the war was going to come over the hump from Burma. So he was stationed in North India, but it never did. But my father didn't come home until I was almost two. So, my mother raised me by herself in New York. Shortly after my father came home, they moved to Orangeburg, New York and, my sister was born. Then, we all moved to Allendale, New Jersey where my brother was born. And then I have a second brother who was born. And then we moved to Ramsey, New Jersey. So, I spent all of my schooling, public schooling in New Jersey in Allendale and Ramsey. They're little towns in Bergen County.

They were, at one point farm towns, but they were basically commuting suburbs of New York City. My father worked for the phone company and commuted every morning into the city, came home at night. My mother, though trained to be a nurse, didn't work after she had children. I went to Douglass College, which then was a separate women's college that was part of Rutgers University. It doesn't exist as a separate college anymore. And then after that I went to Yale graduate school. I always wanted, from the earliest time I can remember, to be a teacher and always wanted to be a teacher of whatever grade I was in. So, when I got to college, and I was good at school, so I just kept going to school. And then I went to Yale for graduate school and then I got this job offer. And those were the days when, I don't know if this happened when you were hired, but those were the days when the chair of the department would go around before the Modern Language Association convention, which is the biggest hiring convention. He would interview people from the top graduate schools in a hotel room. I remember he was sitting on one bed. I was sitting on the other bed. And, I'm a Victorianist. I'm in the 19th century. I remember the faculty member who was in charge of placement for the English department saying, well, Berkeley is looking for someone in the 18th century. And looking for someone in the 20th century. You're in the 19th century. That's kind of in between, so why don't you go into this interview? And it was so unbelievably high-handed, and it was all done with this hail fellow well matched, these are the best schools...

So I got a job offer from Berkeley before Thanksgiving, and I remember crying all night because my vision was I wanted to teach at a little college in New England, and I knew my dissertation director would never let me turn down this job because I knew it was a good job. And so, I

accepted the job and then came out here. So that's a very thumbnail sketch of my early life until I got out here.

Paula Fass:

You and I both cried on getting an offer from Berkeley for different reasons that I'm not going to go into right now...

Carol Christ:

At that point, Berkeley had just fired a whole bunch of people in the English department or not tenured them. And I figured I was going to go out here. I was going to enjoy myself for four or six years and then I would, being able to go to the new England college, I really wanted to go to...

Paula Fass:

At some level, you got what you wanted.

Carol Christ:

That's exactly right. When I went to Smith, I kept thinking this is what I wanted to do all along.

Christina Maslach:

Reverse order there. Okay. Well, so you've already sort of gone into the first question about the hiring process, how you found out about the job and the recommendation. But as you said in those days...

Carol Christ:

Jobs weren't advertised. It was just such an informal old boys network and...

Christina Maslach:

An old chairs network too, because certainly in psychology, I know that the chair would call another chair and say, who have you got?

Carol Christ:

That's right.

Christina Maslach:

And depending on where he called, he might get different answers and so forth.

Carol Christ:

That's exactly right. And a chair would call another chair and say who you've got that's good? And the person in charge of placement would choose who got to go to the interviews.

Christina Maslach:

Right.

Carol Christ:

And so it was such an informal old boys network.

Christina Maslach:

And it was, if I can add the word, maybe paternalistic in some ways as well, I mean in many ways, but in particular I recall in those times that the sponsors of all these people, the professors, would discuss among themselves who should be allowed to apply to college X or college Y. They never, ever had any two graduate students from the same place, same department, competing against each other for the same job, as opposed to “anybody who wants to apply, can.” It was no, so-and-so sounds good for this position.

Paula Fass:

It was a patronage system.

Carol Christ:

It was a patronage system, and I was hired and the last year before the bottom fell out. So, I was one of six people in my class coming into the department, the other five were men. After that it was then only one, one hire a year for years after that...

Christina Maslach:

Okay. So just one at a time.

Carol Christ:

What year did you join the faculty?

Paula Fass:

I came in '74.

Carol Christ:

'74. So this was 1970.

Paula Fass:

The bottom had already fallen out in history at that point...

Carol Christ:

Yeah.

Paula Fass:

...for a couple of years.

Christina Maslach:

And I came in '71 after the infamous, blue book report, which showed that of the departments that had ever hired women at all at Berkeley. . .

Carol Christ:

Yeah.

Christina Maslach:

. . . psychology had gone the longest since the last hire, and that hit the newspapers, because it came out in some sort of press release. I was shocked because I knew so many women from Berkeley who did research that I had to learn about, but they were all...

Carol Christ:

They were researchers...

Christina Maslach:

Yeah, absolutely. There was a huge team of them. And so Eleanor Rosch and I came at the same time, and the chair had sent a letter to the other chairs saying we are flexible with regard to sex, because they knew they had just taken a huge hit, you know, in the newspapers.

Paula Fass:

They used that term? "We are flexible?"

Christina Maslach:

It was trying to say, we've just been pointed out, exposed as 47 years since the last hire. And without saying it, I think they were trying to indicate they were open to somebody else.

Carol Christ:

I was on a committee, I think it was a Senate committee, I think it was SWEM, and we compiled a list of departments called the zero club. Do you remember that? There were even t-shirts of the departments that had no women.

Christina Maslach:

The zero club. Yeah. And some of our earlier interviews have been with women who were coming in as the first, at that time – engineering, chemistry and physics, stuff like that. So there was that. Okay. Anything else that you want to say about what it was like coming then, just being in the department at that point? I mean, as a brand-new person. How you met people, and so forth...

Carol Christ:

Yeah, I was the fourth woman in a department of 80, and so very small number of women, obviously 5%. There were only 3% women on the faculty at that point. I was frequently mistaken for a student. The four women, one was Josephine Miles, who is just an extraordinary person. For people who might be using this, who don't know Berkeley, she was very, very badly crippled by rheumatoid arthritis, considerably older. And, she was enormously supportive to what she always used to refer to as the young people in the department and to the women. She was really supportive of us, but the other two women in the department had been hired in the year before I came and the year before that, so that was Anne Middleton and Janet Adelman. Unfortunately, both dead. But Anne and Janet and I were very tight because we were, you know, we felt like Jo was almost sexless, and we felt like we were the three women in this male department.

Paula Fass:

Yeah. Did you, I mean, what was the response of all the male colleagues to you in terms of the work you did, the teaching, the fact that you were there in the department? Were they from positive to negative to in between?

Carol Christ:

I was always treated extremely well by the department. I never had a sense of discrimination or prejudice or a negative attitude toward me, or my work. I would just always felt supported in the department. The first year I was in Berkeley, I taught a course for the free university of Berkeley on women in literature. Those were the early days of the women's movement. And I remember the chair, the same one that had interviewed me in his hotel room in New York City, came up to me at one point in the hall and said, I hear you're teaching this course on women in literature for the free university, you could teach that in the department, you know? So he invited the course. And, I had never felt, I mean there were some stories, somebody else might think that they were upsetting. But I just thought they were funny. Like, I remember one of my senior colleagues, you know, asking me to come into his office, I was passing by in the hall and he said, how does it feel, being a woman in this department? It's fine. And, he said, but do you think women are different from men? I said, yeah, I do think women are different from men. And he said, I'm so relieved to hear you say that. He said, you must feel so different (gesturing toward my breasts), with those in front of you.

Paula Fass:

That is one of the funniest stories I have ever heard.

Carol Christ:

And he really didn't mean anything bad.

Paula Fass:

It was just a completely kind of ad hoc, spontaneous response.

Carol Christ:

Yeah. Yeah.

Paula Fass:

We've never had to talk about any of this or deal with any of this in our regular meetings and PAH!

Carol Christ:

Exactly, like what are you doing? I was always well treated.

Paula Fass:

Can you go back a little bit to explore that? Because I had the same experience and I'm wondering whether you had that experience as a graduate student because I did and, in a sense, because when I was a graduate student, I was treated with respect and, a kind of equal sense that when I moved into a position as a professor, assistant professor, I didn't think there was any, there wasn't any, issue. Did you?

Carol Christ:

No, I actually didn't have that experience. Where were you in graduate school?

Paula Fass:

At Columbia, which was huge.

Carol Christ:

I was at Yale, and one of my first experiences my first week of being a graduate student at Yale, I'd met somebody in a seminar and he said, I'm going to the Elizabethan Club after (you know, something or another), and why don't you meet me there? And so I walked into the Elizabethan Club, which was an all-men's club, and I was ushered out. But I always felt at Yale that the women had it easier than the men because the men were so anxious. They were always vying for the favor of these very impressive professors who were the great names in the field. Yale was the number one department in the United States, and they just were anxious. And the women, the faculty just really liked the women. I mean, they thought that they were there, obviously, we were bright, and I think that they smiled on us, if you know what I mean. So I never had anything but a sense of support by the faculty. But I also felt like there were the men who were super, super serious about their careers. And then there were the women who, we were very close, many of the women in the department, in the program.

Christina Maslach:

An important thing about just that period [the 1970s] was what was happening in terms of new ideas, new literature, new, all sorts of things that were not part of the landscape before.

Carol Christ:

That's right. But I remember, so you grew up reading Kate Millett and Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer. I mean, it was just, "Thinking about Women by Mary Ellman. I just, you know, ate up these books. They're still on my bookshelves, and it just was at the same time that I was doing this very conventional PhD, I was just, my mind was so alive with the ideas in these books. And that's why when I came out to Berkeley, I started teaching this stuff. I remember there used to be syllabi that were sent out by the feminist press, and they came, I used to giggle about this, in brown paper wrappers. I remember the first one publication of these syllabi, or duplication really, was like 50 courses across the United States. And then by year five or six, they abandoned the project because there were so many courses. So it was this time of explosion of pedagogy in work that focused on women.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. That was really, wow, I think that's something about that kind of late sixties, early seventies, mid-seventies period that we really need to get across. I mean, what was that context, in terms of the ideas and the writings and the work that was being done that just sort of enveloped us.

Carol Christ:

That's exactly right. It was really, I remember it as this ferment and, and it was exciting and the students of course were incredibly eager to take classes like this and to study both the way in which we described it then, or images of men and women in literature and women writers.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Carol Christ:
It was really images of women and literature. It wasn't so much of men.

Christina Maslach:
So how often, and how long did you teach about women in literature?

Carol Christ:
I used to teach it every year. It was women in literature and women writers became, from that second year at Berkeley, just part of my teaching portfolio. It was one of the things that I taught, and because my period is Victorian literature. It just so fits because that's one of the things that's happening in Victorian literature is the woman becomes the representative protagonist. If you think of Jane Eyre or think of George Elliott, it's just that Henry James "Portrait of a Lady."

Christina Maslach:
Oh wow.

Carol Christ:
And then I started teaching a lot of 20th century literature too, and 20th century women writers. But it was always a part of what I taught after that first course for the free university...

Christina Maslach:
Which I recall you said was in your living room....

Carol Christ:
Right.

Christina Maslach:
Can you say anything about the graduate students you worked with during this period? I mean, did you get going with several when you first came or was that later?

Carol Christ:
No, it wasn't my first year, but I certainly, while I was an assistant professor, I did teach graduate students and I had graduate students that wanted to work with me. So I never felt like the graduate students were steered away from me or from assistant professors generally. It was a department that had a lot of graduate students in those years. This was before people shrank back programs because of how awful the job market was. And so the graduate students really looked to the women faculty as really showing them how they could be in this world. So, the English department was always, it was pretty democratic. I there, there wasn't a lot of -- if you were a senior professor, you get certain perks and if you're junior you don't -- it just wasn't that kind of culture.

Christina Maslach:

It wasn't, yeah. Okay.

Carol Christ:

Yeah, I remember that one of the early chairs of the department said to me, everybody has a window on the sea. But what he meant by that is everybody gets to teach one course of their choice that's in an area that is of great interest.

Christina Maslach:

Did you teach any of the service classes?

Carol Christ:

Oh, of course. I mean in those days the faculty taught freshman composition. That's not the case anymore. And I certainly did that. We taught the survey of English literature in small sections, and I certainly taught that, but it was pretty set what you taught. I know because I was vice chair in charge of courses a little bit later, and you got to teach one course of your choice, and nobody taught more than one graduate course. And then you taught either one or two staff courses.

Paula Fass:

And of course, we were on a quarter system.

Carol Christ:

That's right.

Paula Fass:

So, we started...

Carol Christ:

It was five courses, so it was five courses. I was remembering the semester system.

Christina Maslach:

The semester system... Right, okay. With the women graduate students seeing you and the other female faculty as being potential models, or ways in which you can do that career, does that mean that they were also coming to you -- sort of offline, if I can put it that way -- to talk about other kinds of issues? You know, do I have a family and a career, or do I have to make choices?

Carol Christ:

I know, that's so interesting. I don't remember those conversations at all. I, maybe they happened and I'm just not remembering. But, my early years in the department, I was married, and I think about my fourth year as a faculty member, but I didn't have a child until after I got tenure. I remember Janet Adelman and I had children about the same time. Middleton never had children. Josephine Miles, of course, never married. But Janet and I were pregnant at the same time. And I think that I actually thought my colleagues were more discombobulated by my being pregnant, than by my being a woman.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. That's funny. But I think even students could be discombobulated. I remember teaching

when I was quite pregnant with one child, and I know it was in some big chemistry classroom where they have the table in the front.

Paula Fass:

And you hid behind it...

Christina Maslach:

Well no, I didn't hide, but every time I leaned forward into the table top, you could hear this "gasp" as though I was going to do something like squeeze the baby. So I actually had to stop once and start the class by talking about my pregnancy. Like I realized there was a chair that kept being moved somehow mysteriously closer and closer, but I didn't like to sit while I was lecturing, so I told them I was fine standing up. I had to actually talk to the class about what it was like being pregnant, and how I appreciated their concern, but the baby and I were going to be okay. Right?

Carol Christ:

So funny because I was teaching a women's studies course. One of the terms I was pregnant, and I began to be visibly pregnant during the course, and the students were really angry. They said that I had been hiding something from them, being devious by not telling them I was pregnant before I showed, that "Oh, that was offensive." That's none of your business.

Christina Maslach:

Well it's just all different little subtle ways in which people were getting used to a change in their experience.

Paula Fass:

Let me add a story to that, because I think it's interesting. I was extremely nauseated when I was pregnant, and for more than my first trimester, and for some reason, my colleague Bill Bowsma heard about that. And so, he offered to change rooms with me because the lecture room that he was in was close to the women's bathroom. And it was so sweet of him. He said, would you like to, would you prefer having this room so that in case you needed to use the ladies' room? You could use it so that, you know, there's just this enormous range of different responses. We did change rooms.

Carol Christ:

Yeah.

Christina Maslach:

That's interesting. Okay. I'm just trying to think of other things on teaching. I mentioned graduate students. What about undergraduates? You've said something about that, but was there anything, positive, negative, in terms of your being a woman on the faculty teaching this course, in terms of student evaluations or whether they kind of basically felt that yeah, you knew what you were doing.

Carol Christ:

Yeah, I mean, I don't remember anything like that. I always got good teaching evaluations, and I

used to characterize many of the classes I taught of men who were not as smart as they thought they were, and women who were much smarter than they thought they were. And I took great pleasure in giving my women students a sense of the authority of their voice and the creativity, that they had confidence in their creativity.

Christina Maslach:
Nice. Okay.

Paula Fass:
Were you recruited to do administrative work, and were you among the first women to be?

Carol Christ:
I was, and, and I've often thought about my administrative career. I was, very early on, put in charge of women and minorities for the department, whatever the department equivalent was of SWEM. And so yes, I did that from early on. And then this is after I got tenure, but I was made very early as an associate professor, as the Faculty Assistant for the Status of Women and Title IX compliance coordinator. And I was the first woman vice chair of the department. I was vice chair in charge of courses, and I was the first woman chair of the department. I mean, that's moving. I was a full professor by then, but I did do administrative jobs relatively early in my career and did them well and enjoyed them. But I never felt exploited by them. I never felt, you know, Oh, they're asking you to do too much service.

Paula Fass:
Were you the first Dean who was a woman?

Carol Christ:
No, I wasn't. Actually, Beth Burnside was Dean of Biological Sciences when I became Dean of Humanities. And when I became the Dean of Letters and Science, Louise Clubb was asked for a year to be a stand-in as the Dean of Humanities while we looked for somebody who would do it more permanently. I remember one time the three of us were in the ladies' room in Campbell Hall, and Beth said, who would have thought of three women deans pissing in a row.

Christina Maslach:
I can hear her Texas twang while you're saying that...

Carol Christ:
She was really funny. Well, at the time I started doing administration, there were other women, Doris Calloway was the Provost of the Professional Schools when we had the two provosts system.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. And she was very important in a lot of ways.

Carol Christ:
She was so important to me...

Christina Maslach:

For so many women in different spots. I mean, she was kind of tapping you on the shoulder and saying, Hey, there are these issues over here. Maybe you want to take a look at this kind of thing.

Carol Christ:

She was really, really important to me as I often think about those early years in California Hall and how few women there were. But Doris was, when I was the Faculty Assistant for the Status of Women, she was there. And then in my early administrative career, or it wasn't in California Hall, but she was, but she was there and she, I remember her as just being there for me. I'm not sure I ever asked her for some incredible advice, but she was just...

Christina Maslach:

But she was that kind of, I don't know exactly how to explain it, but she was a kind of presence who would find ways to check in with you without being heavy-handed about it, you know? So I mean, it was, you can sort of count on...

Carol Christ:

That's right.

Christina Maslach:

...having that gentle intervention sort of thing.

Carol Christ:

Yeah, that's right, and I don't know if either of you knew Lola Harris. She just recently died. She was a lawyer, although her position was not as a lawyer in California Hall, and she worked on sexual harassment issues and discrimination issues.

Paula Fass:

Yeah, she was a lovely person. Enormously supportive.

Christina Maslach:

Okay, I'd like to do is go back, you mentioned quickly about getting tenure. So, what was that like? Was that just a sort of a normal process in terms of what people went through in the English department or did you have any...?

Carol Christ:

Actually, what was interesting was that I was offered a job by the University of Virginia in my fourth year. It was right about the time that my book was accepted by Yale University Press. And the department voted unanimously. It all went swimmingly, but then it was turned back by the Budget Committee. They said this isn't strong enough for early tenure, and we want her to come back in her sixth year. So I finally got tenure in my sixth year, in the usual timing of it.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

Paula Fass:

So they tried to use the mid- career review as an early tenure.

Carol Christ:

They did, because of the offer. And I, at that point, I was married, I was married to someone who did not get tenure in the English department. And the University of Virginia had offered me a tenured position and offered him a two- year lectureship. And so the department then offered my husband a two year lectureship, and I hadn't -- they voted me tenure, as I said, but then it didn't go through.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. It's interesting because I don't know to what extent that kind of situation of -- well good, but not enough. You've got to wait. Some of the statistics over the many years that have been gathered on men and women going through the whole academic professorial promotion process have shown that there is a really dramatic difference between the number of years for women and men. And so often, I mean, Angie can talk about this, where women are taking more years at each step along the way.

Paula Fass:

Regardless of whether they have children or not? Because of course Mary Ann Mason thinks that there is a big change once you have children.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Even so -- I mean I remember looking at that, that wasn't the something, I mean obviously there was another factor, but I'm just sort of wondering, are there these little other things that may come along where you're saying, okay, they're positive, they're voting tenure, so, okay, so two more years or whatever before you officially get it. But it was interesting to see in the data, and I remember over many decades that there was that consistent...

Carol Christ:

That's really interesting. When I was the Faculty Assistant for the Status of Women, there were a very large number of women on terminal contracts and almost no men. It was very, very striking. The number of women not getting tenure versus the number of men getting tenure, or versus the number of men not getting tenure. And so, I did a lot of analysis and all the women on terminal contracts had either had a child during their assistant professorship or been hired before they had finished their dissertation. And the women who left that were not asked to leave at their fourth year, had both. And there was a point at which a lot of departments, this is one of my theories, a lot of departments were under pressure to hire women and I thought that many of the departments made very bad choices. I mean, in terms of the women's competitiveness, it was almost as if they were saying, hire a woman, we'll hire a woman, we'll show you, she can't do it. I remember Political Science being a department that was really hard, particularly hard in that regard...

Paula Fass:

So that helped to explain why the women who hadn't finished their dissertations, and therefore they couldn't really judge fully what they would be like. . .

Carol Christ:
Yeah.

Paula Fass:
Would then be at a disadvantage when they came up for tenure...

Carol Christ:
And they were at a disadvantage, because that would take them, I mean it takes a while to learn how to teach and if you start with your dissertation unfinished, it really puts you behind the eight-ball in terms of your advancement.

Christina Maslach:
Yes. So in terms of just talking about this whole promotion process – becoming a full professor, I mean anything else?

Carol Christ:
No, no, no, no. It was all pretty much just standard and pretty seamless. It wasn't problematic in any way.

Christina Maslach:
As you know, I mean there were some women who come in and tell very different stories.

Carol Christ:
Yeah.

Christina Maslach:
It's really different departments. Yeah. And, all kinds of things. I mean, in terms of the timing and stuff, but it's just fascinating. . .

Carol Christ:
I knew I'd never felt anything but valued by my department, and given the opportunities I've got, it was not a hostile environment.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. And that I think makes a huge difference.

Carol Christ:
I think it does.

Christina Maslach:
I mean because then you're not thinking about these other things other than what you're interested in, you know, researching, writing, teaching . . .

Carol Christ:
That's exactly right.

Paula Fass:

You mentioned some of the women who were helpful to you just by being there. Were there men that you would like to mention, you don't have to, but if there were, would you like to name them?

Carol Christ:

That's really interesting. I'm often asked to name my mentors and I often say I've just, I've learned so much from everybody that I've worked for. I mean, Rod Park is not exactly someone you would say is a feminist icon, but I learned enormous amounts from Rod and he really was very supportive of me. Mike Heyman was someone who was enormously supportive and gave me a lot of good advice. Chang-Lin (Tien) was someone that I admired tremendously, and he gave me a lot of advice. So men were important mentors to me. But I remember when I was first a faculty member at Berkeley, I was so hungrily looking around the campus for women. I remember Marian Diamond; I remember Herma Hill Kay. I mean, these women -- Laura Nader, people like Sue Ervin-Tripp -- people who were a little bit further down the road than I was who I realized, oh that's the way you are a woman academic.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

Carol Christ:

So they didn't become friends or anything, but I just always was so aware of who the other women were.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. You remember when Herma Hill Kay became the first woman to chair the Academic Senate?

Carol Christ:

I know. I actually wasn't that conscious of the Senate then.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. And I remember going to one of the first meetings that she was chairing and somebody was raising this question, point of order, how do we address you -- as the chair man?

Paula Fass:

Trivial stuff.

Christina Maslach:

I know, but it was like -- it's one thing you just sort of maybe don't even remember, you sort of blow off, but what do we do, what do we say here?

Carol Christ:

Yeah. Yeah.

Christina Maslach:

And she was great at being able to handle that so with such class and grace.

Carol Christ:

Oh, she was so wonderful.

Christina Maslach:

So you learn a lot just by seeing how other people deal with these kinds of things when they come up, and it's kind of like a little thing in your brain that maybe you can fall back on later on or something like that. But I remember there was like, "Oh, what are we getting?" All the photos up to that point in the Senate were in black and white, and she insisted on one in color. Now they're all in color, but at the time it was like...

Carol Christ:

That's so interesting. My portrait as chancellor is the first one in color. So there are all these black and white men and then there's me.

Paula Fass:

Is that right? So then, yeah, it's really a parallel.

Carol Christ:

Yeah. Yeah. It's very funny. It wasn't my idea. I didn't, they just took it -- colored pictures.

Carol Christ:

I can talk a little bit about Women's Studies because I was involved in the creation of Women's Studies, and this was when I was, I think, still an Assistant Professor and I worked with Arlie Hochschild, and also with Gloria Bowles, who was a graduate student in English and then became a lecturer. And we put together a Women's Studies major, and I remember taking it to the executive committee of Letters and Science. And they're insisting on the requirement that we add a biology course because they wanted to make sure that people majoring in Women's Studies knew the biology of men and women. And yeah, it was very funny.

Paula Fass:

And when was that?

Carol Christ:

It would have been, oh gosh, it would have been in the late seventies sometime, I think. I mean I'm sure we can figure that out, but I don't have the date...

Christina Maslach:

I remember getting involved in that as well, and I ended up teaching in psychology.

Carol Christ:

I remember that.

Christina Maslach:

But I think more of the people who started this really came from the humanities initially.

Interesting. Yeah. We want to talk about your administrative roles as well. So, were there any kind of interesting aspects of your experience as you moved through these different jobs? Getting to where you were...

Carol Christ:

Yeah, I was so almost always the first woman to hold a job. I mean, obviously not the first woman to be the Faculty Assistant to the Chancellor for the Status of Women and Title IX Compliance Coordinator. The first woman to hold that job was, my predecessor, Diane Clemens, but she was very ineffective apparently.

Christina Maslach: Was she the very first one?

Carol Christ:

She was the very first to hold that position. And she just was not effective. And I did well at the position, but I also learned that I really liked administration. I loved having a university-wide view, so there was the position, but there was also just being exposed to the world of California Hall, going to senior staff meetings and just really learning something about how the university ran. And that was a two-year position, and I learned an enormous amount in that time and created the campus's first formal sexual harassment complaint procedure. And I did all the investigations -- and that just is so amusing to me now, when we have this whole big office and lots of investigators, to realize how poorly staffed and resourced this was. But I did remember 24 investigations in those two years of sexual harassment complaints. And 21 of the 24, the complainant and the accused were of different nationalities, or different races. And I thought that was an interesting statistic. But then after that I became a chair, I'm trying to remember what the sequence, I think, whether I was vice chair of my department before or after that, but I was vice chair of my department, then I was chair of my department. It's the first woman chair and then I was Dean of Humanities. And then, under the two-provost system, Dean and Provost of the College of Letters and Science.

Carol Christ:

And each time I was a single parent, most of the time that I was doing this. Yeah, so I had two children, two years apart. Right after I got tenure. I got tenure in 1976 and my children were born in 1977 and 1979. And then I got divorced when my son was five, so that would have been 1982. And, so during this administrative career, I had little children and I was their sole parent. Their father was in San Francisco, but he didn't take to it. He just took them every other weekend. It wasn't, he didn't do a lot of work, in relationship to them...

Paula Fass:

How did you manage?

Carol Christ:

I was absolutely rigorous about saying no to travel. I never traveled. And I just didn't go to conferences. I didn't go to meetings. I always had somebody -- I've used a lot of students in the afternoon after school. There was childcare after school and I didn't go out evenings. I just stayed at home with my kids. And so looking back, it must've been very hard, but I didn't have the sense that it was very hard at that time. It was just what I did.

Christina Maslach:

You had to do it. Were there any other family or personal issues? I mean, do you want to continue talking about that or get back to administration?

Carol Christ:

I'm not sure there's anything else to say. I mean, I remember incredibly comic moments, like when my daughter got head lice and I was called home because... of the lice. But I just, you know, it was...

Paula Fass:

Rushing to get that shampoo.

Carol Christ:

Yes, exactly. Yeah. And I remember sitting in the driveway of my house combing the nits out of her hair, but I always felt that kept me balanced, that I was always understanding. It just kept things in proportion about my job because I had this major responsibility for my kids.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah, yeah That's interesting when you say that -- and also because of the thing you mentioned about the men being so serious at Yale. I remember talking to someone about coming up for tenure and he was asking, so how are you handling that? You really have to be sure you're getting your publications out and all that kind of thing. I was standing there with Rhona Weinstein at the time, and I said to this man, so tell me about your experience. And he described this whole thing. He had a kind of study, nobody was to disturb him, you know, the kids, the dog, the whatever. And basically, it came down to the fact that he had a wife and a family who just took care of everything and didn't bother him with any stuff. And Rhona and I were just trying not to laugh in his face saying right, okay. You know. But I think that counterpoint is also that kind of sense of balance of other parts of your life that you were more likely to engage in.

Carol Christ:

Yeah. One of the most influential articles in my life is, Arlie Hochschild's "Inside the Clockwork of the Male Career," which is exactly about that. And she always talks about the male where she talks in that essay about the male career having this cottage industry that supports it. And that wasn't true of me. And I remember when I first had my children, I was, Oh, I felt like I was undergoing a crisis in my relationship to time because I'd always been the kind of person who, when she got to work on something, just worked -- 10, 12, 14 hours, just very, very deeply. When you have children, you know, you can't do that. And so I learned how to be able to take any hour, or any two hours and get a lot done in it rather than having to have the exact conditions for productive work. And I thought it made me better at my job.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah.

Paula Fass:

I think that what you just said is just so exactly correct. And it goes along with your saying it's

what we did.

Carol Christ:

Yeah.

Paula Fass:

I mean you, people, women who succeeded in balancing those things both took pleasure in both directions, no matter how difficult it was. And it was what we did.

Carol Christ:

Yeah, yeah, exactly. And I got to be very efficient, which is something I still use. I learned how to be able to prioritize, to let go of the things that, in my judgment, were not so important. And, so I just learned to be able to move my attention from thing to thing pretty quickly.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah, I remember working for you, part-time as a later Faculty Assistant on the Status of Women. I remember a lot of us just thinking, wow, how has she developed that kind of laser-like focus, which is like – just here, completely doing this. Done. Move on. And doing it very easily and gracefully and it's kind of like, wow, we're getting through all this stuff really well. So that's an interesting story in terms of honing those skills.

Carol Christ:

People are often, or sometimes (I shouldn't say often), but they have a sense of, Oh, this has been so challenging and so hard, and I've had so many obstacles. I actually think that there are real advantages to having a more complex life, that it gives you things too.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I will just say briefly that it was such a great pleasure and honor for me to work for you in that position.

Carol Christ:

Oh I really enjoyed that.

Christina Maslach:

You remember that?

Carol Christ:

Yes, I sure do.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. And the cases that we had come up, and the thing that was so amazing to me was something would happen, people would come in to talk to me about some egregious thing going on, and I would write something up for you and then I would go in and talk with you about it. And I think you went out on every single case and got it done. Even when there were people who were kind of recalcitrant about it, but you did. There are still women faculty on campus, periodically, who come up to me and say, I don't know if you remember me, but I was the one

who came in about X, and I am thinking, yeah, and Carol went to talk to the Chemistry department, or Carol got the Budget Committee to change their decision, or whatever it was. Anyway, thank you for all of that.

Carol Christ:

It was really rewarding. And I think another thing you learn, I have been thinking about this a lot lately, is you learn to be decisive. If you don't have time to natter. And mostly... You realize you've just got to get it done.

Christina Maslach:

There's no benefit to being wishy-washy for a long time. It's kind of like, what are you going to do? Yeah, that's right.

Carol Christ:

It's like you're in the supermarket and you've got 15 minutes and you've got to get all the groceries for the week, and you don't sit there over the meat counter thinking what...

Christina Maslach:

Yeah, no, not worth it. So anyway, one thing I wanted to ask you about, getting now back to the administrative side, is that so many of us who had been in California Hall or had spent time with you, that when you were being considered to be Chancellor the first time around, were so sure that you were going to get it. That we were ready to lay money on it, and so we were just stunned and shocked beyond belief when it didn't go that way. Can you talk about, from your perspective, what that whole experience was like?

Carol Christ:

It was very disappointing to me. I really wanted that job and thought that I would do a really good job at it and felt that was one of the only times in my career where I felt that I was not being fairly regarded because I was a woman. In 2000, I decided I was going to leave the Provostship and go back to the faculty. And then I realized, when I got back to the faculty, that was a career I had already left, that I really was just not engaged in the way that I, a faculty member, needs to be engaged with their research. And so, around that time Smith came knocking and I thought, Oh, the New England college of my dreams... And so, I went to Smith, and I've thought about this a lot, I am so much better a Chancellor now because of my experience at Smith than I would have been had I become Chancellor when I was a candidate for it in the late nineties. So it was really, it taught me so much and I really believe in the benefit of going someplace else and understanding. I mean, when I was at Smith, I used to joke all the time about the Smith bubble, because there really was a Smith bubble, it felt like it was like Lake Wobegon, the best of all possible worlds. And when I came back to Berkeley, I realized there's a Berkeley bubble just like there's this Smith bubble. And so I had -- I was talking about this actually just this morning, that being the person, being the president and in that kind of institution where the president has a lot of power, unlike this one, where the Chancellor is answerable to the UC President and it's a much, much stronger, shared governance. So, it really taught me how to use the authority, and also it was very freeing to be in a women's college. I just felt great, actually.

Christina Maslach:

How many years were you there?

Carol Christ:

11 years.

Christina Maslach:

11 years. Okay. Wow.

Carol Christ:

It was really, yeah, it was very important to me. I learned so much when I was there.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. And so what happened that you then said, I'm done with that?

Carol Christ:

Well, Smith presidents stayed about 10 years. I was there 11... But that was... And of course, my husband (the second husband, I married again in 1992) -- my second husband, very shortly after I decided to step down, became ill with brain cancer and he died. He died that year.

Christina Maslach:

Oh, I'm sorry.

Carol Christ:

Right before I left Smith -- actually, he died on graduation day of my last year. It was just incredible -- and then I came back here to retire, and was doing consulting, and then I was tapped to be the head of the Center for Studies in Higher Education. And then when Claude [Steele] resigned, quite suddenly as the Provost, I was the interim Provost and then the Chancellor. So that was just such an unlikely end of my career, I didn't ever expect that I would be doing anything but being retired at this point.

Christina Maslach:

I remember asking you at one point, when our paths crossed or something like that on campus. And I was saying, I can't remember what I asked, but something like, will you stay on beyond the interim Provost position? And you said Oh, no.

Carol Christ:

Yeah, it took me a long time to come to a sense of maybe in relationship to the Chancellorship. I kept saying, no, no, no, no, I will not be a candidate. I'm too old. And then finally I agreed to see the search committee, just interested in telling them my ideas about Berkeley so, yeah.

Christina Maslach:

And now looking back on what then transpired...

Carol Christ:

Yeah. I'm really glad that I've done this. I feel like I have a set of experiences, and also I'm at a stage of my life where I think that I can move Berkeley through some of the real dilemmas that it

has. I'm not looking for another job, so I feel that I can have the courage to do things that are sometimes hard decisions without worrying that I'm going to damage my reputation or credibility.

Paula Fass:

Well, if I may say, so you've already brought Berkeley through some of the dilemmas that had had some serious budgetary matters, and you've already done that.

Carol Christ:

Yeah. I have just a great team. It's one of the things I learned at Smith is how you build a team and you really give people authority and, and then hold them accountable for using that authority, and there are a lot of women on my cabinet, I don't even know if you've noticed.

Christina Maslach:

I didn't know whether to ask that, but since you did.

Carol Christ:

But it feels so good. You know, when I was the Provost the first time, Herma Hill Kay was, I think, the only woman Dean, and then after that Pat Butler, in the School of Public Health, but now there are a lot of women Deans and, and a lot of women members of the cabinet. So I feel really good about that.

Christina Maslach:

And, a lot more women chairs of departments. I mean, when you start looking at the whole pipeline, in some sense that's not an unusual thing, as it used to be. Which is kind of nice that it's just sort of normal and that's not an issue. I mean, it's just, you know?

Carol Christ:

That's right.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. Usually at this point is where I ask, is there anything else that we haven't talked about or mentioned or brought up that you think would be important to do?

Carol Christ:

Yeah, I'm trying to think if there's anything, I mean this has been very thorough and I'm trying to think if there's anything that I haven't talked about that would be useful to talk about.

Christina Maslach:

It's an open kind of thing. And sometimes what people have come up with is I would never have thought about at all, and, or it's something that is perhaps more unique to their experience, and they recognize that. But it's really meant to say that we're not trying to *not* go into some areas or ask certain questions. And if there's something that you think would be valuable to share for this, please do so.

Paula Fass:

What about the East coast, West coast thing?

Carol Christ:

So liberating. I mean, so different from the East coast. And I just felt this world is one in which hierarchy, where you are from is so much less important. So much more, you know, this was Berkeley in the 70s. It was a very liberating place for me. And when I went back to the East, I realized my perception wasn't wrong. I mean that there still was, particularly in Northampton, there was a sense you were a newcomer, even if you had been there 20 years or 30 years, and, people really cared a lot about where your family was from. And it was, it was so much more formal. The society, it was much more, not what are you doing? But more who are you? And, and...

Christina Maslach:

Where are you from?

Carol Christ:

Yeah, where are you from? It's just, it's so different.

Paula Fass:

And then you decided to come back to the West coast?

Carol Christ:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, I never would've stayed in Northampton. I thought, Paul and I thought a little bit about going to New York, but I love California, and I love being in California and it's not just the weather, it's really the culture out here that I really like.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Are your children still out in the West now?

Carol Christ:

My daughter is in Massachusetts, very near where Smith is, and my son and his wife moved here two and a half years ago, but she's just gotten a job in Portland and so they're going to move to Portland.

Paula Fass:

This Portland?

Carol Christ:

This Portland. Portland, Oregon. Not Portland, Maine. No, not Portland, Maine. But it's been wonderful. And I have a stepson to whom I'm very close, who lives in Salt Lake City, and I've seen him a lot.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. Yeah. So there's other reasons also.

Carol Christ:

Yeah.

Paula Fass:

Carol still has a 101-year-old mother.

Carol Christ:

Yes. I do have 101-year-old mother.

Christina Maslach:

Really? Okay.

Carol Christ:

Yeah. And she still has most of her marbles, and I think we just were talking, we'd talk on Sundays, and she is telling me that she wished they would stop all this impeachment stuff. Just let the people decide. She watches the news every day. She reads the newspaper every day. She's still, she's in a senior facility, which is good because it gives her, you know, she needs help. But until about three years ago, she was living on her own. She's really amazing.

Paula Fass:

And was she heads over heels when she realized that her daughter was going to be the first female Chancellor at the University?

Carol Christ:

Oh my mother. My mother's attitudes about things are very complicated. She calls me her brag daughter, making my siblings feel awful. But she also talks about how women damage their children by not staying at home with them. And you know, she's, she's very...

Paula Fass:

Outspoken.

Carol Christ:

She's outspoken, opinionated, very conservative. She cast the first Democratic vote of her entire life when she voted for Hillary Clinton in the last election. Because she said that man is not temperamentally suited to be president. Which is right.

Christina Maslach:

I mean, imagine -- given her background and her general philosophy to have said, I'm going to make that change. That's huge, yeah.

Carol Christ:

Oh, it was huge. And she's not going to continue, I'm sure, to vote for Democrats. She's really a Republican, but she recognized something about him.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. It's one of the interesting things I've always found in talking with other colleagues about our parents, as we all age and they do, is that how many of us have a situation where there's a

grandparent or a parent -- sound mind or sound body -- you only get one, and you can't take your pick (there was an old folk song about that, that you don't always get both). And so we were talking about would it be better to have your mind, and the body is beginning to go? Or healthy as a horse, but dementia? There are different experiences and different ways of coping.

Carol Christ:

Well, she's, she's frail. She's certainly frail, but, and oh, but she is, and she thought she was dying about a year ago, and she was in hospice, but then she recovered and fired hospice. She's a strong-minded lady.

Paula Fass:

We can see where your strength comes from.

Christina Maslach:

Okay.

Carol Christ:

Well thank you. Thank you. This was really a pleasure.

Paula Fass:

Yeah. Great interview.

END.