

UC Santa Cruz

Out in the Redwoods

Title

Jean-Marie Scott: Out in the Redwoods, Documenting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 1965-2003

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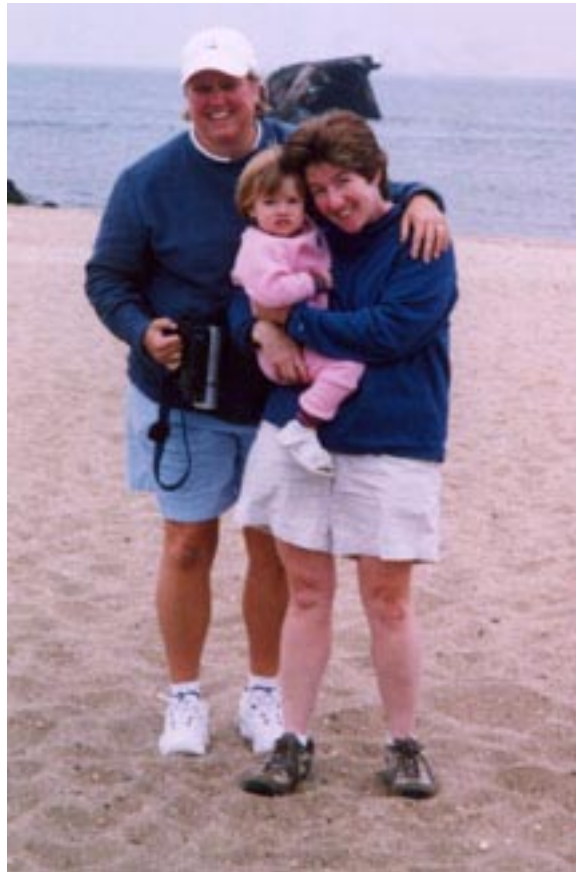
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JEAN-MARIE SCOTT



Jean-Marie Scott (left) with Carol Tolbert and Cameron Tolbert-Scott, June 2003

Interviewer, Valerie Jean Chase: *Jean-Marie Scott has been an administrator at UCSC since 1993. In 2000, Scott became the Associate Vice Chancellor for Housing, Dining and Child Care Services, making her the highest-ranking out lesbian administrator at UCSC. She was interviewed on August 30, 2002 in her office at UCSC.*

Chase: Let's talk about your early life first—where you grew up, what the gay/queer climate was like.



Scott: I grew up back East in a suburb of Philadelphia, was the second in a family of five. I have an older sister and three younger siblings, pretty traditional family: mom, dad, raised Roman Catholic, went to Catholic school until I was eight, then went to the public junior high and high school. I had a really great childhood with my family and didn't understand that there was anything different about me until junior high school. I seemed to never fit in with some of the cultural norms and always sensed an uncomfortable feeling around gender issues and sexuality and dating. At a time when all my other friends were interested in boys, I just never quite fit. At the same time, I tended to have really strong friendships with my female friends.

In high school that became even more intense, in the sense that I always felt like something was missing and I wasn't quite fitting in, in terms of my relationships. Socially and academically I excelled; my high school experience was really positive. But the emotional side of my relationships with my female friends seemed to be very intense. I had great friendships with guys. I played sports so I always had men in my life, but I never quite had an interest in terms of dating, the relationship part, and yet the mass media and our culture in my high school was all about male/female and dating and the whole dating scene. So I always knew that I didn't fit in, but never understood why. There was no such language or any representation of GLBT issues in my high school.

I grew up in the mid-1970s back East, pretty conservative environment, family pretty conservative around issues of gender and sexuality. I know the first time I ever even heard the word *lesbian*, was when my mother was upset with me. Although she didn't yell at me often, she was upset with me because of my intensity around one of my friends. She blurted out, "Are you a lesbian, or something?" I remember feeling hurt, but at the time I didn't register what it was or how it applied to me. I just knew that it was a hurtful word, because in our high school or in our social groups I would hear people use words like *lesbian*, *fag*, and I always knew that it was with a negative connotation. At the time my mom used it, she was using it in anger and I didn't understand why she would use it towards me, but I remember it hurt.

I went off to college, and it wasn't until my junior year that I had my first relationship with a woman. It was very positive, but it was very short-lived and it raised all these emotional questions and angst and pain and—*confusion*, would be the best word. At the time, I had more information about gay and lesbian people, and I went to the other extreme to disassociate myself with any possibility that I might be gay. I immersed



myself in trying to find relationships with men, just trying to convince myself that I couldn't fit into that category. I had great role models and mentors around, and women who actually were very supportive of me, people at the institution, my coaches, the deans. I worked for the vice chancellor, a woman who was very, very astute and wise. She never raised the issue of my sexuality or gender or relationships, but always was very affirming of me and supporting me in terms of trying to find myself. I ended college really confused. I had a great career pathway. I excelled academically.

I went on to graduate school, and it was my second year in graduate school that I had another relationship with a woman. That lived itself out for several years and that was pretty much it. [I was] still pretty closeted in the early-1980s, back on the East Coast, working at the University of Delaware. There was some GLBT representation in the community, but in my relationship with the person I was with, we chose to be very closeted about it. I had a lot of great male friends who were gay and they were "out as out could be." They were jet setting all over the eastern seaboard with life in Florida, and some of the other big communities on the East Coast. So I lived vicariously through them, but I still distanced myself from them, and from the GLBT culture. I went on that way for another eight years until... I worked in western Pennsylvania for a time, and that's when I had another relationship; it was about a four-year relationship and we were much more out.

At the same time, western Pennsylvania is not the place to be out, so we had to be very selective about where we were out, and who we were out with.

My move to San Jose State in 1988 was when I was at a place that I could be more authentic and more out. So from 1988, until roughly, probably 1993, I spent a lot of time working with queer issues, became more comfortable with myself, and more willing to serve as both an advocate and a role model, particularly because of my work with students. I solidified my understanding and commitment to being as authentic as I could be, because there were so few role models for students in our communities. This was a time in my life where I felt strong enough about myself that I could be authentic, and be out-there, and be who I was.

Chase: So you had finished graduate school and you were an administrator at San Jose State?



Scott: Yes. I finished my graduate degree in 1981. My degree was in counseling and student development. I had worked in student affairs ever since I was an RA [residential assistant]. In 1981, I went to the University of Delaware and spent four years as a residential staff member, then from Delaware I went to Slippery Rock University, where I was the director of residence education and housing. Then in 1988 I went to San Jose State, and in 1993 I came to UC Santa Cruz, where I started as a college administrative officer at Porter. Two years ago I was promoted to associate vice chancellor.

Chase: That's a good lead-in to how you got to UCSC. You were at San Jose State. How did you hear about UC Santa Cruz? What brought you here?

Scott: I'm a big believer in pathways and things that were meant to be. When we first arrived in California, we came to Santa Cruz to go to the beach, being the beach lover that I was. I saw the UC Santa Cruz sign and I just had an intuitive moment where I was like, oh, I'm going to work there. It wasn't that I strategically planned to get a job here. I didn't follow up on that; I didn't go to San Jose thinking the whole time that I wanted to be at Santa Cruz. I just had an intuitive feeling and then I spent five wonderful years at San Jose State. I never thought that I would leave San Jose State. But things unfolded and I started doing some training and development work at UCSC. Then I had some friends take positions here, and eventually several of them corralled me into thinking about the Porter position. I was offered an interview at Porter, and as soon as I met the staff I just intuitively knew, oh yes, this is the one. I received an employment offer within a couple of weeks.

Chase: What attracted you to UC Santa Cruz? Was it because it was more GLBT friendly?

Scott: My initial, intuitive feeling about why Santa Cruz—there was no foundation in that. It was just...an almost spiritual feeling. Through my time of working with the campus and becoming familiar with how it was organized, that attracted me to the campus. From the student development perspective, I wanted to have a residential college experience where I could see if the literature about living/learning environments was congruent with the actual implementation of a program. So my intentionality was in wanting to experience a college model.

When I interviewed at Porter, there was a moment where I holistically had a connection with the students, their interests, what they were looking for in a leader. They resonated



with me. I knew that there were a number of gay and lesbian students and staff members in the college. I knew that the art students were looking for someone who was inclusive, and not afraid to talk about all kinds of issues that may be perceived as radical or cutting edge. Although I came from a very conservative background, because of my commitment to students and their ways of learning, it was easy for me to be open to hearing their needs and then thinking about—okay, how do I as an administrator develop the kinds of programs and services that can meet these students where they're at and support them in their learning and growth? So it just naturally made sense for me to be at Porter. I think I was also much more confident with who I was, and my comfort level and being able to have less confusion about my identity so I could be more sensitive to the process of where [the students] were at and what they were looking for.

Chase: So you were out from day one when you were here?

Scott: At Porter, I didn't make a big deal of it in my interview. I think there was one question, maybe, about my background and who I was. I talked about my pathways, and in that reflected my own identity development and the things I value.

Chase: Being out to your students, what was your impact at Porter? At that time, programs like the Queer Fashion Show skyrocketed.

Scott: I didn't necessarily spend my time advancing GLBT issues, but I strategically spent my time thinking through how to build a foundation for a program and a curriculum that would give the students support, safety and voice, so that they could identify what issues they wanted to have advanced. I think in that process and in that space, and I believe this for all students, is where they will show you what they want, and they blossom. The students were blossoming certainly before I came aboard, but I think I was able to institutionalize certain curricular things in the student life program. Then, I hired a number of new staff members into residential and student life positions. We were able to put together a team that really gave the students a space to identify what they valued in student programs and what they needed in our student program—whether it was representation in the arts, representation in our performances and our student activities, bringing in national speakers and conferences. It all came together in about 1995 or 1996.

Todd Bowser, who was then one of our residential staff members, I credit him and several other community members who were able to think about queer representation,



and then apply that in a curricular way to our student life program. That was the era of not only the Queer Fashion Show taking off, and again I credit Todd and the students for that program, but it was also a time that the campus was trying to better identify what the needs of GLBT students were, and how to institutionalize at a campus level some programs to support their needs.

Shane Snowden and Gail Heit were instrumental in looking at what could be done on the staff side to support students. That's when the development of the GLBT Resource Center, the [creation of the] director's position, and the recruitment of Deb Abbott into [that] position occurred.

Also, it was at a time when Porter received the vice chancellor's approval to host the systemwide UCGLBTA ["Exposed"] conference. Historically, UCGLBTA was a business conference with GLBT programs, but Todd Bowser integrated it with the academic provost, who was willing to fund and bring intellectual and faculty-related activities into the event. Annie Sprinkle was a part of that conference. Loren Cameron did a photography show representing transgendered individuals in transition from one gender to another. We had a number of other really wonderful speakers on queer issues, particularly transgender issues. At the time that was the current [issue]—where do transgender issues fit within the context of GLB issues? It was a really exciting time. I think that all coming together in a condensed period solidified the GLBT program at Porter. It also really jump-started the campus at a broader level. Prior to this, certainly things were happening in the community, but I think it elevated and institutionalized the GLBT Resource Center.

Chase: In a way, you had the opportunity to make sure the resources were available for your staff to take off with their own projects.

Scott: Right. Resources, structure and guidance...and expectations. To really verbalize that the program has to have congruency with the students' learning experience. And for the art students and Porter students, we needed to be open to providing the platform. With the platform, they could give us a sense of what they were looking for in the program, [so that we could] then provide the challenge, the support, and all the resources to have them achieve that. My role as an educator is to institutionalize platforms for students to find their voice, and to find their identity.



Chase: Is there any particular incident from your years at UCSC which epitomizes the intersection of your being an out lesbian and administrator at UCSC? I know as an administrator you're sometimes in this position of having to be very circumspect.

Scott: Probably two things that I'll highlight. One's not minimal. It's being able to go to the Queer Fashion Show and to be with the students and just support them, and not get offended, and not be surprised, and not be shocked, and not pass judgment in terms of the event, and how they choose in an artistic way to represent who they are and how they see the world. It's no big fanfare; I just do my usual. I sit upstairs in the VIP area. I'm me, just participating in the event as an individual. Yet because of my title, the students or the staff will project, "Wow, Jean-Marie's here, the associate vice chancellor."—to just be with them in that moment. I think that's really important and I value it, and I think they value it.

The other big thing, which was almost a real challenge for me to experience, was when we hosted the UCGLBTA Conference. The Annie Sprinkle presentation was extremely...in the GLBT community, it wasn't necessarily risky, but for the campus it was somewhat risky and controversial. Although, compared to other intellectual domains that we've hosted here on the campus and we've asked the community to be engaged in thinking about, it actually wasn't that controversial. What made it controversial was that *60 Minutes* became aware of it because the Christian Right was monitoring our website, because they monitor all GLBT things across the nation. The Christian Coalition got involved. They contacted *60 Minutes* and made it an issue of public funding—is this really the kind of educational information that we should be using public funds for? Fortunately, because the program was integrated through our college provost with our faculty, it then became an issue of academic freedom of speech. But at the same time, it's rare that you have *60 Minutes* call the campus, so when they do, and then you have this movement from the Christian Right, it was very stressful. We had to methodically work through it and be politically astute in the sense of wanting to support the students, support the event, justify it under academic domain, but also understand that this is a sensitive topic, and when universities are funded by public governments, balancing the needs of the campus to be successful with Sacramento and so forth is quite challenging. I learned a lot from this experience, and I found the campus to be remarkably supportive. The vice chancellors, all the way up to the chancellor were very mindful, supportive, and inclusive.



Chase: You've spent about twenty years in residential student life. What are some changes you've seen?

Scott: Since 1975, starting with my college experience, until now, 2002, we've come light years on a national level, in terms of student affairs, understanding the criticality of providing support for GLBT students. We're starting to see some movement in the high schools and the earlier years. We still have many more things that we need to be doing, and helping, and supporting. Even in the most supportive climate, sexuality for any gender is complicated and painful and confusing, so if you add the dynamic of same-gender relationships, and then you add the dynamic of religious and cultural backgrounds the student might have, you add the family dynamic... There're so many additional pressures on a GLBT student than there are on all the other students. We still aren't there yet, in terms of both our research and understanding of the developmental needs of students in these cultures or cultural subgroups, or the programs and services that are time-sensitive and really meet the students at their place of learning and place of need.

At a national level, UC Santa Cruz is... When I go to other campuses, or when I have colleagues visit, they see what we're doing, and we're really expansive in terms of how much we're doing, where we're doing it, how it's integrated in so many different aspects of the campus, and how public and open [we are about GLBT issues], how good our students feel. From UCSC there's the continuum of campuses that are privately funded, religious-affiliated, in the middle of the United States, cut off from a lot of the media and support systems. So there's certainly the continuum. Santa Cruz is probably on the far end of one side and then there are universities on the other side. I think the majority of public institutions in the nation have really identified the criticality for [GLBT] programs and services and have tried to build more inclusive climates. Of course it really depends on where you're at in the nation. Things tend to be more supportive on the coasts. And then the middle of the nation still... It depends on the campus, it depends on the city or the community.

Chase: Will you say a few words about what it's like to be a gay alumni? You can speak as an alumni of your institution, and if you have any words as an administrator, commenting about UCSC.

Scott: Let me first speak to my own undergraduate [institution]. I graduated from my program in 1979. They have faithfully through the years sent me information, wanting



my financial support. Certainly in my younger years, I just answered no, because I didn't have any money to give, but more recently, I finally bit the bullet, wrote a letter and said, "I'd love to give you money, but unfortunately, I don't see any representation of GLBT students, alumni, staff in your newsletters or your annual reports. I love the institution, and would love to support you, but I need to understand what you're doing for GLBT students." I didn't expect to get a response. But I actually received, directly from the vice chancellor of student affairs, a letter with a bunch of material, and it turned out that the vice chancellor was a former residential director when I was a student on campus. She's a woman and she remembered me. It was wonderful and so now I do send money back specifically for the GLBT Resource Center.

I'm still sending feedback because the newsletter is still very Anglo, hetero-based. All the pictures are about the people who got married, and the alum who got married, and they're all pretty Euro-American. The babies—they always have announcements and it's always, "he and she." So I continue to send notes back. I sent pictures of my family in my last letter and I anticipate they'll publish it. That's the one institution I'm involved in, and I anticipate I'll become more involved if they continue to show they're supportive and inclusive.

I can't really speak about UC Santa Cruz. I haven't attended too many alumni events. Certainly we have the GLBT reception. I'm working right now with a bunch of GLBT faculty and staff on trying to get some development going for the Friends of the GLBT Resource Center. Historically, I think this has been a campus that's been well-supported by the GLBT community. Our alumni office is very much involved and open to supporting anything that we want to do in terms of fundraising, development and activities.

Chase: Have you ever felt like you couldn't pursue your career in student affairs because of being out?

Scott: I'm not looking to leave Santa Cruz, because I love the campus, and I love Santa Cruz, and I feel really fulfilled here. But if ever I had to leave or wanted to leave, being a lesbian and particularly having a family and a child, I know that I would have to limit my choices of what regions in the nation and institutions I would be able to work at. And that's sad. I would like to think that if I wanted to, I could go work somewhere in Montana or Texas, but based on what I've learned from other colleagues around the nation, there are just certain schools that are safe, and probably certain schools you



wouldn't feel good at. That has limited my thinking about if I were to ever pursue other opportunities beyond Santa Cruz. I would limit myself to certain regions and certain schools.

Chase: Going back to some of the critical comments I've heard from some on campus, there are those who wonder why not all members of our community are out on campus. Do you have any comments or thoughts on that?

Scott: I think it's part of the individual's pathway, and I think it's that way for any issue. You have to respect and embrace people where they're at and support them. Everybody has a different pathway and a different way of being. The best we can do as a community is to respect and embrace and support people as we would want. As a queer community, we are asking the rest of the nation and world to embrace and support us, and respect our path. I also know that developmentally it's part of a progression, and that everybody finds a comfort level that works for them in terms of where they're at developmentally. Respect people and embrace them for where they stand. I guess that's the way I see this.

Chase: You've mentioned your family. I want to ask, as a lesbian parent, do you have any thoughts on the community? In a way this is such a small town. I don't know that you get the privacy of just going home to your family.

Scott: Well, for me, Valerie, it's not, because I'm pretty comfortable with being out in the community, and socially being out in the community. I don't seek privacy in my personal life. We're pretty well connected; we've established a large community in all types of membership, not just in the GLBT community, but my straight community, my sailing community, my Santa Cruz community. I don't necessarily seek privacy outside of work, so when I run into people from work, I just see them as part of my community. I don't necessarily distinguish like, oh wow, I wish I didn't run into that person. Particularly students. Whether I've worked in a small community, or a large university town like San Jose, I'm out there in the community. I don't distinguish between my communities.

In terms of raising a child and having a family here in Santa Cruz, again, I think we're blessed on so many levels that I'm not conscious of being different as I move throughout the Santa Cruz community. Now it's interesting when I go to other areas. We spent some time down in Santa Barbara and I found myself being a little more...not as comfortable when we walked down the street, or when my partner and I were at a restaurant taking care of the baby, and we were referring to ourselves as mom and mommy. I kind of had



moments of self-imposed homophobia, where I backed off a little, and that intensifies as we move around the nation. When we go back East... Within my family I'm very comfortable, visiting relatives, but if we're running around lower Delaware down by the beach area, it's a pretty conservative area, and so you find yourself contracting a little. At least I do. I contract a little bit. It's a self-imposed contraction, but it's related to the culture or the dynamic of the area.

Chase: What direction do you see the UCSC GLBT community going in? What's around the corner?

Scott: Well, I think clearly, to institutionalize and stabilize ourselves we need to find a way to have additional funding streams and create some self-dependence upon development and our own ability to bring in funding to support the programs [developed by] students, faculty and staff. That's not to say there's any indication the campus itself [won't] continue to be supportive. But as the number of students grow, and faculty and staff grow, and the need and interest and demand for services grows, I'm not confident that the funding streams will be able to grow at the same level, particularly as we have a program that's almost self-perpetuating. Success breeds success and the students want more. So our ability to find other funding streams to compliment what we get from the campus and from our student fees, I think is really critical to our long-term sustainability.

The other thing is that the needs of students are going to change and they're continuing to change. So programmatically, how do we stay ahead of that curve and understand what students will need five years from now? They're coming at us [from] whole different places in terms of what they've been exposed to in the high schools. I keep thinking and believing that the high schools are going to continue to get better and do better, and that our media is going to continue to become more affirming and more matter-of-fact, and just out-there with representation of all types of relationships and gender. The more that happens, culturally as a nation, the more it'll happen in earlier years and our students will need different things from us than what you or I might think they need. So our ability to stay ahead of that curve is our challenge.

Chase: Imagine somebody in 2070 reading this oral history. What would you like them to know about your life as a gay administrator at UCSC that we haven't covered?



Scott: Probably that what I'm doing, I'm doing because it really does matter to me on every level. That I'm trying to be as authentic as I can be in the process, and as kind as I can be in the process. And that in my world [I] always try to be clear about first things, and whether we're talking about our own children, or the K-12 schools, or our college students, first things are building supportive, inclusive environments in which each person can thrive.