

UC Santa Cruz

Out in the Redwoods

Title

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

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GWENDOLYN MORGAN



Interviewer, Jacquelyn Marie: *Gwendolyn Morgan came to UCSC as a re-entry student in 1989. She graduated in 1991 with a B.A. in classics. She then worked at campus housing, and afterwards was chosen as one of four multicultural outreach facilitators in affirmative action for one year, and then was appointed coordinator of the Diversity Education Program for staff until*



2000. I first met Gwendolyn in the McHenry Library, where I was the women's studies/reference librarian. She and I became friends. We also worked together on many diversity events about women's issues and gay/lesbian issues when she was the coordinator of diversity education. I did this interview on January 5, 2002, at her home in Castro Valley, California, where she lives with her partner Gail, and their dog and bird.—Jacquelyn Marie

Marie: Can you start by telling me about yourself, your family background, ethnic identity?

Morgan: I'm a fifty-eight-year-old African heritage woman. I was raised in Michigan, before the civil rights movement, and I sometimes like to forget about that experience, growing up in Michigan, because it was not one of the best experiences. A lot of racism, a lot of sexism. I got out of Michigan as soon as I could.

Marie: What year were you born?

Morgan: I was born in 1943, in the middle of the Second World War.

Marie: And you came out to California in what year?

Morgan: I came to California in 1961. I went to Los Angeles, and I met someone and had a daughter in 1963, Paula, who lives in Atlanta right now. I lived in L.A. for about twenty-five years. I moved to Santa Cruz in January of 1989. That was my first quarter at UC Santa Cruz. I was a re-entry student. I came in as a transfer junior. I barely got squeaked in because I had a lot of transfer units. The door closed after I came through. If I had had any more units they wouldn't have let me in, for some reason.

Marie: What made you come up to Santa Cruz?

Morgan: I was going to school and working at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. I hated my job. I just hated it. At that time they gave full-time staff people tuition remission. My boss at that time, whom I disliked immensely, we disliked each other immensely, said I would probably never do well in school. I just didn't have it to do well in school. That was the wrong thing to say to me. That was a challenge. So I took a summer school class in the classics. It was Aristophanes plays. I enjoyed it. It was really a good class taught by a good teacher. I started taking more classics classes, and I ended up thinking, now what am I going to do? I didn't want to work there. And if I didn't work there I couldn't go to school. It was one of those Catch-22s. So I started looking



around at schools to see where I could transfer, how I could live, and what I could do. There was really nothing holding me in Los Angeles. So the opportunity presented itself. I applied to UC Santa Cruz. I thought about Santa Barbara, and then I said, no, I don't want to go Santa Barbara. Too much of a party town. I didn't know Santa Cruz was a party town, too. I was just looking at the academics in the classics department. That's really what drew me, and a recommendation from one of the faculty at the school I was attending.

Marie: They recommended Santa Cruz.

Morgan: Yes, as having a really good classics and literature department. So I applied. It's funny, being the first person in your nuclear family to go to college... You don't know how I struggled to get that application together. I was living in a furnished trailer. I would sit up and look at that application... And I'd look it... You had to write a statement of purpose. I had no clue of how to write that statement of purpose. I typed and typed, and re-typed. Finally, I had to turn it in because there was a deadline. I was coming in winter quarter of 1989. I had already missed the fall quarter. I really didn't want to go in with all those freshmen, and all the hoopla that goes along with going in for the fall quarter. I really wanted to go in an off quarter, so I could get the feel of the campus. So I finally had to turn the package in. I did the best I could, but... There is an art to writing a statement of purpose. I didn't have that art. Nobody had ever taught me anything like that! Writing a statement of purpose? You just say, "I want to go to school." This is it! "And I need financial aid, by the way." So I wrote it and I went in under the Educational Opportunity Program [EOP]. I was an EOP student. But I was actually a good student. I think I came in with a 3.7 or a 3.8 grade point average. So it really didn't matter, EOP or not. But I thought that would help me. I checked EOP on the application. I thought that would help me get in the door.

Marie: That's possible.

Morgan: That's what I was looking for. I needed to get in. No question about it. I wasn't going to be re-directed to UCLA or one of the other campuses. I was going to Santa Cruz. I had already made up my mind I was going to Santa Cruz. So I got into Santa Cruz. I came up, quit my job with a smile. I had no clue. I could never visit the campus because I was working, and I was trying to work up until the last day so I could get all my money, so I could have a nest egg to go to school.



I came up. I looked around. I paid my first quarter's registration fees, and that left me with six hundred dollars. It was crazy. I had six hundred dollars left to find a place to live, to buy my books. It was really gutsy of me to do it that way. But I did. I enrolled. I took classical music with Leta Miller. It was a basic class. I needed an "H" requirement, or something like that. At the time, I was homeless. I was living in my car, because I had paid for my registration fees, I had bought my books, and I didn't have enough money to find a place to live. I must have been loony to do it this way. I figured I could study in the library. I could stay warm in the library. I could eat at the Whole Earth [Restaurant] or at the residence halls if I could afford it. I would park my car and I would just sleep.

That was the best quarter I ever had. [laughter] I was homeless. It was amazing. I made friends in my classes, and I put out the word to various women to let them know—do you know of anybody who has a cheap, cheap place? But I was homeless for six weeks during the winter quarter. It rained just about every single day. Actually, it was a blessing that it rained because I could park my car, and there weren't too many people out walking around in the rain when I was sleeping. So I was pretty safe. Because it was just pouring and pouring, I stayed at the library until they closed. I stayed and I studied and I took a little nap.

Marie: I'm so glad the library was a welcoming, warm place for you.

Morgan: I'd go up on the fourth floor and take a little nap, because it was quiet up there. I'd just put my head down on the desk and I'd sleep. Anyway, so that was my best quarter.

I found a place to live in Robin Drury's home. She had this garage with this room that had a loft. I stayed there for three years. Even after I graduated I was still there. I graduated in 1991.

Marie: And your major was?

Morgan: Classics, with an emphasis on Greek, Roman and Egyptian history. I took several Latin classes, although I was not a Latin minor. I did pretty well. I studied all the time. I moved into Robin's garage room. It was cheap. It was just perfect for me. I was by myself, and I could stay up all night and study, and then take a little nap and go to school. I would study most of the night, and get up really early in the morning, nobody else would be up, and I'd walk across the back lawn and take my shower, and then be at



the school. I was always on time, never missed a class. You know how some students just go off? I couldn't afford to do that because I figured this was going to be my only time that I could do this. So I was dead serious in my classes, and studying, trying to get halfway decent grades. I'm not a scholar but I applied myself. I was so focused. I graduated in 1991. I got honors for my thesis, which was amazing to me because I had trouble... I mentioned that statement of purpose. I look at that statement of purpose now and I think, how in the world did they let me in? It was pitiful. It was really sad.

Marie: You showed promise.

Morgan: Well, evidently. I think I showed promise. It was one of the best decisions I ever made, going to Santa Cruz. It helped with jobs and secure employment. I stayed in Santa Cruz for ten years, 1989 to January of 2000. I moved up to Oakland and...well, prior to that I was having a few affairs, but we don't want to talk about that. [laughter] I met my partner in January of 2000, and in October of 2000 we bought a house and we moved out to the Castro Valley. Which is where I am now one year later, gardening, cleaning, with a bird, a little cockatiel, and a little rat terrier. We have a family.

Marie: And your partner is a woman?

Morgan: Yes. I met her... I'm not embarrassed to say this, I'm not embarrassed to say anything. I was corresponding with this woman whom I met through the personals ads on the internet. And we agreed to meet at this Baymates BBQ that they were having in Fremont. Baymates was run by Lavender Rose. I said, "I'll come to Fremont." This was after I got my car. "I'll drive on up and check you out." Well, we knew instantly that we were not going to be together in any shape or form. But I met this other woman there, my partner Gail, and it was romance, love, all that stuff.

Marie: This is interesting, because to my knowledge this is the first woman you've been with.

Morgan: No.

Marie: Well, maybe I don't know. I have other questions to ask you about your University experiences, but maybe, since you brought this up, we could go back a little bit.

Morgan: Okay.



Marie: Well, first of all, how would you identify yourself at this point in terms of sexuality? Would you put a word to that?

Morgan: It's really hard for me to identify, to put a label on myself, because I have been labeled all my life. When I was born in 1943, I was labeled black, woman second, but black [first]. That is a stigma that has stuck with me for fifty-eight years. That's the first thing people see, is this black woman coming towards them. So it's really difficult for me to add another label. I am in a lesbian relationship. I identify right now as a black woman of African heritage who is in love with a woman. That's the way it is. I am married to my partner. We're married. We've done the domestic partnership. We own a home. We have our little family. So it's really difficult to add that extra little label, because I've been labeled and stereotyped all of my life. I was labeled at the University. I [pause] don't know how this is going to come across, but I would kind of flirt with women and they would look at me like, who... I couldn't quite figure out what was going on. Was it my color? Or they didn't think I was serious? Or what? And I asked a couple of women out. "Oh no, sorry." I thought—okay...

Marie: And were these women identifying as lesbians?

Morgan: Yes, absolutely. I could never figure that out. I said, well, there are more fish in the sea. I found one. So as far as the lesbian community is concerned, I did not have a good experience in Santa Cruz. Because I don't know if I wasn't taken seriously or not. I don't know what the problem was. I'm a full-figured woman. I've always been full figured. I don't know if that had something to do with it or not.

Marie: Do you think there was a point where you said: I'm coming out. I'm going to tell people, or let them know that I am interested?

Morgan: Now that's interesting, because I assume... I could have been making an ass out of myself. I assume because if I ask you out, you would know that I'm not looking for a friend; I'm looking for a date.

Marie: I think it can be much more intricate.

Morgan: Yes, it's complicated. When I asked Gail out, she assumed that I was asking her out on a date. So what's the difference?

Marie: Baymates was a place where they are lesbians?



Morgan: Yes.

Marie: So when you walk into a room, you know that everybody there is going to be of that persuasion. Whereas when you are working, or doing something on campus, and you come up to somebody, they don't know where you are coming from.

Morgan: That's true. But I think I made it really clear that I was interested in not going down the friend road. But maybe when I'm a hundred years old I'll look back on it and think, well, maybe not.

Marie: Was there a particular time in which you started doing this? Had you done this in L.A.?

Morgan: Oh, I was with a couple of women in L.A. If I had to put that label on me, and I'm putting it on very lightly, I would say I was bisexual. Because in L.A. I was married for a number of years, and after the marriage broke up I was in a relationship with a woman. I was also in a relationship with another man, but then I went back to another woman. And that was the last of the male relationships.

Marie: When you were speaking about your life to new people did you talk about that?

Morgan: No, no.

Marie: Well, they would probably guess that you had a male partner because you would talk about your daughter.

Morgan: Yes, that's true. I always talk about my daughter. No, it's a good question. It could have been my own homophobia coming out. Because we all have it. There's no doubt about it. Just because you are a lesbian or a gay male, it doesn't mean you don't have homophobia. It's possible I was afraid to come out too far out of the closet. Because knowing my experience being black in this country, it can be kind of scary to lean too far out the door.

Marie: So it wasn't something consciously that you did.

Morgan: No.



Marie: Well, from a personal point of view, for the record, I have known Gwendolyn for many years, and I would not say that I knew that you were bi. I would not say I knew that until a few years ago, maybe, when you started appearing at GLBT things on campus. Then you were really, what I would say, from personal experience, more out. I went through that same thing myself. Fearful of my job, etc. So it felt to me like you were somehow feeling safer. Not that you suddenly came upon these ideas, necessarily. But that you were feeling safer, and you were more willing to be out. What made you feel safer? Do you know?

Morgan: It could be that I just am older and I just don't give a hoot anymore. We can talk about this community that we live in now, in Castro Valley. It's really a very straight community, more so than Oakland, definitely more than in San Francisco. When we were looking for a house, we looked in San Francisco because I wanted to live in San Francisco. We didn't have the money to live in San Francisco. No way. We didn't have the money to live in Oakland. So we had to go where our money took us, and that had some consequences. Our neighbors really don't give a hoot. They know. They just don't give a hoot. When we moved in here, they came across the street and introduced themselves to us right after we got the keys to the house, and said welcome. They told us about the people who lived here. They were drug dealers. They terrorized this whole street here, the people that lived here terrorized them. So, two women obviously fixing up the place... That's the first thing we started doing was adding, improving things. They really don't care. But I know this community is basically a straight community. I have seen little bumper stickers in the BART stations and in parking lots... Oh hope! There are a few more of us around. And we participate in the Hayward Lighthouse Community Center, which is a gay community center. We go to their Friday movie nights for women, and talk to other women. And we sort of belong to this Women's International League for Peace and Freedom group, which is the older lesbians, and they get together once a month, and they have dinner and talk about what's going on in the community.

Marie: Is that in this area?

Morgan: It's actually in San Leandro, which is a few streets over.

It really doesn't matter now. In Los Angeles I was very closeted. I had relationships with women and it was always in the back of my mind—why are you doing this, when you could just find some man, stay safe, just fit in and nobody would really care? But I just



couldn't do it. I really couldn't. When I moved to Santa Cruz I said, I'm just going to be celibate. I had school on my mind, survival. That's really what I was focusing on, until after I graduated, school and graduating and getting a job, and trying to keep the job.

At my first job on the campus, there were some homophobic comments... I would never, ever admit that I was even bisexual.

Marie: Could you talk about your first job? You don't have to name people's names.

Morgan: It was a clerical position in the campus housing office. I just couldn't believe some of the things that I heard. I heard some of the comments, and I said to myself, well, I need a job. I'm just going to lay low because I needed a job. I had to pay my rent and survive until I was ready to move on.

Marie: So you would not have felt comfortable letting anything out about your life?

Morgan: Oh, absolutely not. I kept my personal life to myself. I would come up to San Francisco every once in a while and check out the books and the videos at Good Vibrations. I'd take a bus up and have a good time, kind of let my hair loose.

Marie: I know you don't go to bars.

Morgan: Oh no, I don't drink.

Marie: But did you go to any groups at that point?

Morgan: I was trying to hook up with various groups, and since it was such a distance, it was kind of hard. But I bought books and a couple of videotapes that I still have, that we watch every once in a while.

Marie: So would these be lesbian-oriented?

Morgan: Oh yes, very much so. But it was hard for me to make a connection with a group in San Francisco, because I was living in Santa Cruz and I had a job. I said okay, I'll come up here every so often when I need to breathe, or get out of Santa Cruz and just become freer. I felt like with Santa Cruz being such a small town, I couldn't be very free. I didn't experience the freedom that I do here, or in Oakland, or in San Francisco. Even when I go back now... We don't go back that often. Every once in a while we'll go down



to Deborah Johnson's church, and I don't know, I just get a little tightness. I don't know what that's about. A little tightness, like oh, I think I want to go back across the hill.

Marie: Well, you mentioned before about being obvious as a black woman, being seen as a black woman. So does that have something to do with it, in terms of the Santa Cruz community and what it looks like? I guess you'd have to differentiate between the community itself and the campus, to some degree.

Morgan: Well...

Marie: Did it have anything to do with that? Also, you were an older student at that point. Did you feel like that as a student, too? Did you feel like you stood out?

Morgan: Oh, I definitely stood out. I was older than my professors. It's amazing that the younger, eighteen- and nineteen-year-old students... They would come to class... Half the time they would... I don't know what they were on, but when I was a preceptor there... Thinking back, I know exactly what they were on—they were loaded, coming to class and sitting there taking copious notes and not listening to a word. They'd walk out early. I'd be sitting there until the class was over. So I did stand out as an older woman, as a black woman taking the classics. You don't see people like me taking the classes that I was taking. When I took Latin with John Lynch the first quarter, I was the only one.

Marie: So you add on Gwendolyn going out and taking a woman lover, and that would have been just too...

Morgan: Oh, that would have been just...

Marie: Unless you did it in some other city and then...

Morgan: Some other city, and then come back to Santa Cruz and resume my life. But that's living a double life.

Marie: Was that part of the reason why you went up to San Francisco?

Morgan: Probably. I didn't admit it to myself then. I was just going to take a break.

Marie: What would have made it different for you at Santa Cruz? Do you have any ideas on that? What would have made you feel more comfortable?



Morgan: If I would have found other women like myself in my age group.

Marie: And you never did?

Morgan: I never did. I had friends, some good friends. You know Jesse Virago. We were good friends. In some cases she didn't understand where I was coming from. It would have been nice to have several women my age, mature women, taking classes, and meeting for coffee and just talking about whatever we needed to talk about. But I didn't have that. So I went into my little shell, and I did what I needed to do to survive. That's what I call it: survival. And whenever I got a chance I was gone. I'd go down to LA. and, hate to say this, have a one-night fling.

Marie: That's interesting. It's interesting in terms of Santa Cruz and what that meant for you, who you were there, and how other people might have seen you there. That's a whole other thing. I know that several people were really surprised when you... What we perceived as "came out."

Morgan: Hmm. But to me I'd been out for a long time. And it's like, what's the big deal?

Marie: Usually in society when people come out in their fifties, or are perceived to have come out in their fifties, that's an interesting thing. You ask, well, how did they feel before that? How come it's suddenly happening now?

Morgan: Well, it's not a sudden thing.

Marie: So it's very interesting why it is that you were not perceived that way, and also just in general why you felt that you had to be more circumspect.

Morgan: I needed to survive. I needed my job. I just didn't feel comfortable coming out and saying, "I'm a lesbian." And I wasn't really comfortable with labels. I'm still not real comfortable with labels. I carry on sometimes with my partner. I say, "I'm in love with a lesbian. But I'm a heterosexual." [laughter]

Marie: Well, when did you feel that you were bisexual? Were you quite young?

Morgan: I felt that I was bisexual even when I was married.

Marie: But you never had a physical experience?



Morgan: Not until after the marriage ended.

Marie: How long were you married?

Morgan: Fifteen years.

Marie: So you were in your thirties?

Morgan: Yes, I was in my late-thirties. I'm trying to remember the year. I was really not very open with my daughter, because I was afraid that if she found out she would turn against me. What can you do?

Marie: Have you told her?

Morgan: Oh yes, absolutely.

Marie: Has she met Gail?

Morgan: She hasn't met Gail. That's an issue. At first she refused to say anything about Gail. And lately she... The last correspondence from her is, "Tell Gail I said hello."

Marie: So that's a little opening.

Morgan: It's a little opening. I'm taking that opening, taking whatever I can get. She has to realize I'm her mother. That's not going to change. I have to live my life the way I feel comfortable living it.

Marie: Do you feel she still has some issues?

Morgan: Oh yes. She's known [since] when we were in L.A. that I had women friends. You know what? I do believe she's known all along, even when I was in L.A. But you know how you can block out certain things and say, "Oh, that's just her friend." I would stay with a woman friend over the weekend. She had to know. I just didn't come out and drop it on her doorstep, so to speak. But I have taken a little opening that she's given about saying hello to Gail, and we'll leave a message on her voice mail. She's in Atlanta, Georgia. We wished her Happy New Year. Both of us did. And we'll see what happens. We were planning on going to Atlanta in the spring, but I don't think we're going to do that. We gave her the option to come out here. We'd pay for her plane fare to come out.



So she may do it. It's cheaper for one to come out, than for both of us to go and put the dog in the kennel and the bird...

Marie: You have a family here with Gail and the animals.

Morgan: Yes, but my daughter is too. She is my daughter.

Marie: Well, I'd like to go back to UCSC. When you were taking classes, and I know you were doing classics, and so maybe this isn't so relevant, but I wondered if there was any kind of LGBT content in any of your classes? Did you take any women's studies?

Morgan: Oh, I took Akasha Hull's *Women of Color in the United States*. But I didn't have much wiggle room to take too many classes outside. I had transferred in with so many units. I took that class. I think that was the only class I had room for. I wanted to take Bettina's [Aptheker] class, but she wasn't there when I was there. She was on her two-year leave. That would have been wonderful, if I could have taken her class.

Marie: What about role models? Would Akasha been any kind of role model for you? I know she pretty much identifies as a bisexual.

Morgan: I didn't see her as a role model, personally. Actually, she was rather distant. But that could have been me being afraid to reach out, or it could have been she was distant. I saw her as a faculty person, a black faculty person in a very powerful position. I wanted to do the very best I could in her class because being black, there are times when you have to strive harder. You have to be better because you have to prove... And I wanted to prove to her that I was worth being in her class.

Marie: Because here you were a black student being in a class with a black professor?

Morgan: Yes. So I tried really, really hard. I was only looking from one perspective. She's the teacher. She's a black woman. Oh, I've got to get this right. I did all my reading. I was never behind in my reading. It was amazing I stayed sane.

Marie: But it did have lesbian content in the class and she was comfortable with that?

Morgan: Oh yes. It was great. It was really very comfortable. But as far as a role model with her, no.



Marie: Were there any other professors whom you reached out to in any way, or felt comfortable with as a woman of color, as a re-entry student?

Morgan: As a re-entry student I reached out to Roz Spafford because she was my writing faculty person. I stayed with her throughout my time as a student, because I took several classes with her. She was my faculty adviser on my thesis. I reached out to her because there were other re-entry women in her classes, not black women, in her classes. And there were older women, which helped me to get over this fear of writing. It really is a fear. It's a blockage that you have to get over, and learn how to write in academia. I had to get over that. I'm still trying to get over that a little bit when I write proposals for my job. But there were other women in the class. It was a re-entry class for all of us. Some of us were up here writing and some of us were here, and some of us were at the bottom. But she made us all feel special. She used to come to class and tell us, "I get sick every time I start teaching." It made me feel like, boy, she's human! Sometimes I didn't want to go to class, because I didn't think I'd spent enough time on this paper, and she would have us doing this journaling. I thought that was the worst thing in the world, to put my thoughts down on paper in this little book. Oh, I just resisted. And do you know what I do to this day? I journal. [laughter] I hated it because it was exposing me. It was churning up... I realized when I went through therapy that it was bringing up all this stuff that I had stuffed down. All the little insults. All the little digs. It was bringing it up to the surface. Now what do I do? I journal on the computer. I have several little books. One is for work. One is for home. I journal all the time. I used to take BART into the city when I was working in San Francisco. That's what I'd do. Every morning. Do a little journaling. It's amazing. It shows you how far you come.

Marie: Also, something that you gained from UCSC.

Morgan: Oh, absolutely. Like I said, I kicked and screamed. I'm not going to do this! But here I am.

Marie: Were there particular books that made an impact on you, particularly in terms of being a woman of color and bisexual?

Morgan: I would say the plays of Aristophanes. They had some very strong women in those plays. He was a comic writer. Well, there was some seriousness in his writing. But the plays of Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*. Strong women. There were other strong women.



But I really enjoyed it. I just got into it. I still have most of the plays, the books. And every once in a while I'll take one out and I'll read a play.

Marie: So you could relate to these women?

Morgan: Oh yes. They were not privileged. I could relate to them because they were suppressed, very much so. And I felt like to a certain extent I was suppressed. It was wonderful to read how they stood up for what they believed. It made a big difference. I haven't quite figured out how I'm going to do that.

Marie: What?

Morgan: Stand up and make a difference in the world. Maybe when I retire I'll figure it out. I'll coach delinquent women, I don't know.

Marie: This type of interview I think is extremely important.

Morgan: It is.

Marie: That's why I'm so glad that you are willing to do this. I think it's extremely important to have your voice be heard.

Morgan: It's like going through therapy. [laughter] I was in therapy for three years while I was in Santa Cruz. I could say anything to my therapist and her hair would not turn any grayer. She was not even moved. She helped me bring up these issues and face them for what they are.

Marie: This is when you were a staff person?

Morgan: Yes. Every week I was sitting on my therapist's couch; every week I'd go and say, "I don't have anything to talk about this week." And all of a sudden here I am, pouring out my...

Marie: And this is someone in Santa Cruz?

Morgan: A lesbian. A woman of color. She understood a lot of the things I was bringing up to her, and the fact that I was slowly inching out of the closet, more and more. She understood. How I ended up with her, I don't know. Someone I could talk to gave me



some names. I said, let me try this person. So I did. I hit it off with her right away. It was extremely helpful.

Marie: After you were in housing, could you talk a little bit about your next job, in terms of how that may have helped you in terms of yourself?

Morgan: After moving over from housing, I went over to affirmative action, and coordinated the Diversity Education Program, which brought me out as an individual. I didn't realize how creative I could be until I started coordinating that program. It was a program for staff on campus, and my job was to get staff to come out and talk about staff issues. We had Culture Talks. The program put me in touch with a lot of people on campus. There were not only women. There were various programs on campus, and we did programs together to educate the campus about the various cultures that make up diversity. It gave me the opportunity to reach out to the Native Americans, to the Asian/Pacific Islander group, the African-American group, the Chicano/Latino group. I still have some of the flyers for the programs I did.⁴¹

It really heightened my awareness that there is a lot of diversity on the campus. A lot of it was hidden, but there was a lot of diversity. There were a lot of interesting people that I was able to talk to, and get to share their experiences with the campus. I'm thinking specifically of the Culture Talks. Those really brought out the individual. All I did was stand up there and say, "This is so-and-so, and they are going to talk about their experience." But it really opened my eyes as to the vastness of the diversity on the campus. And it helped me with my coming even more out of the closet, because I felt safer in the department I was in. It just felt better. It was open. There were several people of color. There was one lesbian in the office. There was another woman about my age, close in age. So it just felt more comfortable for me. I sort of came on out and did my thing.

Marie: So you could see the diversity that was lacking in what you saw as a student and in your last job?

Morgan: Oh, absolutely. There was a vast diversity among the staff. I didn't see it among the student population. I didn't see it at all. A lot of times I was the only person of color in my classes as a student. But as a staff person, I could see it. I tried to bring that out

⁴¹Materials on the Cultural Diversity Program are available in the Out in the Redwoods archive.



when I was coordinating the program, to have as much diversity as possible represented, highlight the various cultures. I think I was pretty successful in doing that, in bringing the groups out.

Marie: Would you say that the GLBT group was one of those cultures?

Morgan: Oh, absolutely.

Marie: What kinds of things did you do with that group?

Morgan: Well, actually you and I did a couple of programs. We got together with the GLBT Center on campus and we did a couple of programs.

Marie: With Deborah Abbott?

Morgan: Yes. To try to bring awareness to the campus that we're here. We're not going anywhere. You just have to get used to it.

Marie: So you worked sometimes with Deborah and the Center? And that was a good working relationship?

Morgan: Oh yes. I enjoyed it. I also enjoyed working with the Women's Center. I enjoyed all of the groups that I worked with. They were all so different. It made me smile because they were all so different. It was a pleasure working with them. I wish I had that experience working right now. Now I am working mostly with women transitioning from welfare to work. They have a contract with Alameda County, so I am working with that particular population. As a program manager, I don't have that hands-on that I used to have with the various groups. If I have hands-on right now it's because I am doing a workshop for these specific women. It's not that often I can do it because I have to do the other program stuff, the budget and the billing and all that stuff.

Marie: That's the part of it that you miss, talking to everyone and cajoling them into talking about their lives?

Morgan: Yes. "Hey! Talk on. It's no big deal. I'll be right there behind you." [laughter]

Marie: Did you feel that they would be more willing because you were more willing to be more open?



Morgan: Oh yes, absolutely. I had talked some people into doing some things for the Diversity Education Program that they probably wouldn't have done otherwise.

Marie: Well, I seem to recall a Culture Talk with Nancy Stoller talking about being a lesbian grandmother.

Morgan: Yes, I thought that was one of the better ones. It was probably through working through Deb Abbott or one of the other groups that I got to make contact with her. I just called her up and said, this is who I am, and we'd love for you to do a Culture Talk. I don't think I would have done that otherwise if it hadn't been for the program that I was coordinating.

Marie: You had not taken a class with her?

Morgan: No.

Marie: Did you suggest what she might talk about?

Morgan: She came up with the topic. I said "That's wonderful. Right on! Can I put that topic on the flyer?" She said, "Go for it." I used to send out flyers about the programs to the campus.

Marie: So when you approached her you just said, "I'd like for you to do a Culture Talk?"

Morgan: Yes, "About your life, your experience on campus." I knew she was a lesbian. She's out. I said, "If that's what you want to talk about, bring that in." She said, "I want to talk about being a lesbian grandmother." It was very successful. We had a lot of people there. We had some of her students there.

Marie: Did you know anything about UCSC and/or Santa Cruz having a sizeable gay community? Had you heard that?

Morgan: When I was in Los Angeles applying to Santa Cruz I had kind of heard that UCSC had a sizeable gay population, but that was not the reason I applied there. That was not my focus. I was looking for a liberal arts college where I could finish up the classics in the least amount of time. But I said, yes that would be a plus.



Marie: So you thought it might make you feel more comfortable?

Morgan: Yes.

Marie: But it didn't.

Morgan: It didn't because there were not that many people of color who were out.

Marie: And you were including the Santa Cruz community as well?

Morgan: Yes.

Marie: Were there any differences between the University community and the Santa Cruz city or county community in that way? Or did you have much to do with the local community?

Morgan: I didn't have much to do with the local community. But I had a couple of bad experiences going to the mall in Capitola. Early on, I was followed around most stores. That was not a good experience for me. I was in J.C. Penney's and the store detective was following me. I knew he was the store detective. You live in Los Angeles, you know what they look like. If you're a person of color, you know what they look like. I was wandering around the store mindlessly because I was still a student. Mindless, because I just needed a diversion from studying. I had taken the bus out there, and I said, well, I'll just get me a cup of coffee and I'll just go walk up and down the aisle, and then I'll go back and hit the books again, because I knew I had to. I was followed around J.C. Penney. I didn't have a backpack on. All I had was a little purse. Nothing that would make anyone follow me, other than being black. Of course all black people steal! That's a stereotype. So I tended to not spend too much time in Capitola or the surrounding communities. I would still come up to San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley. I was always up in Berkeley.

Marie: Before you would go to downtown Santa Cruz?

Morgan: Yes. Because I felt like I had this thing on me that made me a target. So I would take the jitney [shuttle] up on Saturday. As a student, I could ride pretty cheap. And I'd go to Berkeley. I felt more comfortable. There were all kinds of folks like me around.

Marie: But you stuck it out in Santa Cruz for awhile, though.



Morgan: I did. I stuck it out because I didn't feel that at the time I graduated I had any choices. I wasn't sure where I was going to end up. I knew I was not going to be in Santa Cruz for very long. But I wasn't sure where I was going to go. When I took the Diversity Education job I said, well, I'll stick it out for a couple more years. I went over the job listings. I really wanted to go up to Berkeley because I felt I could be more open. I could just be one of the crowd. I could just blend in. I would not stand out. I could just be another person just wandering the streets and having a good time. And maybe a date or two, with a woman. [laughter] That would have been part of it.

Marie: Gwen, you were talking about the Diversity Program and it not being so successful. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Morgan: Well, I coordinated the program from 1995 to 1999, four years. And towards the end of the year it was not well attended. It didn't get the support that I thought it should have gotten from the top administration. It was an excellent program. We did evaluations at the end of every year, and we took those suggestions, the evaluations, comments and changed the program around to suit the staff on campus. But in the end it died. In 1999, I was laid off. I continued working part time recruiting for the campus until the end of December of 1999. In January I found another job working for San Francisco Casa, and I moved up to the Bay Area. But I still have a lot of the Diversity Program in me.

Right now I am a program manager for the Davis Street Community Center. San Leandro Works Program is the program that I run. It's a Welfare to Work program. I incorporate a lot of my diversity training into hiring decisions for the program, how I treat our various clients. I run staff meetings, and I insist that everybody have a part in the staff meeting. I've made suggestions to my executive director on other kinds of programs that they could do. We have eighty staff in our agency. Once a year they do a staff training, and I made suggestions based on my diversity training that I received and the experience that I've gotten from running that program. I still have a lot of my old calendars that I produced for the campus. I just loved doing that because it gave me an opportunity to look at all the diversity that was out there on the planet. If I missed something, people sent me email; they called me and they told me about it and it showed up the next time I did the calendar. I used to produce a calendar every month. Then we went to a three-month calendar which I would put together, a quarterly calendar of diversity. I would celebrate all of these cultures and events. It was one of the best things to me that I ever did. I still have a few of those and I look at them every once in a while.



Marie: Those calendars are missed, I can tell you. So how did you feel at the point you were laid off because the Diversity Program was no longer going to be funded? You didn't have any other position there.

Morgan: No. I took a part-time position doing recruiting, because the recruiter was out on maternity leave. I had been doing that twenty, thirty percent of the time anyway, along with coordinating the program. I enjoyed recruiting. I enjoyed getting out there doing the workshops. I did workshops in Watsonville and in Santa Cruz. And talking to people. That is one of my skills, I think. I enjoy talking to people and helping them figure out what they need to do to get a job. Basically I'm doing the same thing right now. I enjoy it.

So I left campus.

Marie: Did that feel like an okay move to you?

Morgan: I didn't want to go. But I knew in my heart that it was about the best thing I could do. When I left campus and got the job in San Francisco, and found an apartment about a minute away from my now-wife in Oakland, I was more than ready to go.

Marie: You were already going with Gail by then.

Morgan: Oh yes, we were together. We would commute down on the weekends. I would go to Oakland for the weekend and come back down on Monday morning, at five in the morning, to go to work. She'd come down and she'd leave... It could be really hard. We did that every weekend. When I moved she helped me move all my stuff up and I found a place to live. We didn't move in together. We were two minutes away from each other.

Marie: When she came down with you then it was obvious, here was a partner. So you introduced her as your partner?

Morgan: I was a preceptor at Cowell College and I was in Parker House. It was the biggest house at Cowell. All my students knew. I didn't have to make an announcement. She appeared and it was obvious. My residential assistants were not concerned. I met Gail at the end of the first year that I did precepting. She started coming down on the weekends. They'd knock on the door, and if I was tied up or doing something she would answer the door. They would leave a message or come on in. It was no big deal.



Marie: How about staff people. What kind of reaction did they have?

Morgan: I can't remember what kind of reaction I got, if I got a reaction at all. Most of the staff people were not around on the weekends. So when I was a preceptor I was there on the weekends, or I was in Oakland on the weekends. But during the week I had my regular job and I'd go home in the evenings to do the precepting. We went downtown when Gail was in Santa Cruz on the weekends, and we'd run into someone and I'd introduce her and it was like, oh no big deal.

Marie: When you started telling people was there any kind of reaction?

Morgan: I don't remember. Nothing really stands out.

Marie: Your partner, Gail, is Anglo, right?

Morgan: She is a white European American.

Marie: Are there any issues about being in a biracial relationship? Things you are working on.

Morgan: We're working on several things. When we first started going out and dating, I would come to Oakland, stay with her for the weekend. We'd go to church in Oakland. We both were in New Thought religion. I was attending Deborah Johnson's church, Inner Light, and she was attending the East Bay Church of Religious Science in Oakland. So we were on similar paths. We would go to church in Oakland, and it was almost like hostility being with her. I would feel like... It's hard to describe unless you are a person of color, the looks and the stares.

Marie: Because the congregation was mostly what?

Morgan: Mostly of African heritage. I would say twenty-five percent were European Americans and others. But the hostility came from the lesbian community in that church because I was with her. It was coming from the black lesbian community because I was with her. I'd come up just about every other weekend, so I was a kind of a presence in that church. I enjoyed going. But it was such a... I don't know how to describe this. It was just plain hostile sometimes. I would get some of the weirdest looks from the other obvious lesbians in that church, because I was with her. It just blew my mind.



Marie: Do you know why?

Morgan: No. After I moved up here full time we started going to that church just about every Sunday. We were singing in the choir together. Believe it or not, in the choir together. Everybody knew we were a couple. I mean, it was no doubt about it! We didn't receive any hostility from the choir members. We sang in the Monday night choir. But we could see people... We would get up on stage during the service and the choir would sing. Sometimes we would hold hands while we were singing. Because we felt like it! We were holding hands and we'd get these weird looks. I'm looking out at the congregation. I don't know what that was about. I never asked anybody, because I really didn't care. I just said hmm, okay.

Marie: Do you suppose it has anything to do with—how come you're not in their community? How come you went outside the black community? Not the fact that you are a lesbian, but how come you're not with another black person?

Morgan: Oh, it probably has a lot to do with it.

Marie: An attractive woman like you and there you are off...

Morgan: ...with this other woman. Oh, I have no doubt in my mind that that had something to do with it. We no longer attend that church. After we moved here in 2000, we started going down to a church in San Jose. We're very open. Nobody gives a hoot about us, other than, oh, nice couple. It's a very, very different atmosphere. I don't perceive any hostility because we're in an interracial relationship. Every once in a while we'll go down to Santa Cruz to Reverend Deborah's church.

Marie: Is [the one in San Jose] a multiracial church?

Morgan: Oh yes.

Marie: That has lesbian couples in it?

Morgan: There are a few. Not many. We're the only ones who attend just about every Sunday. We hold hands and we're accepted. I would say the racial balance is fifty-fifty for that church. We have a black minister, but the congregation is very balanced. It's a small, really diverse church. I know there are several other lesbians in the church, but it's really a very different atmosphere.



Marie: What about when you go to Deborah's church in Santa Cruz?

Morgan: Well, I know a lot of people there.

Marie: Is that good or bad?

Morgan: Well, it's good and bad. I know a lot of people there, because I was going there even before I thought of going to Oakland. She had church twice a month and I always went. I haven't perceived any hostility.

Marie: Well, she's [Deborah Johnson] been in an interracial relationship before.

Morgan: Yes, I've actually met one of her ex's. Several.

Marie: And the group that would be going there. Is that pretty mixed?

Morgan: Yes, it's a very mixed group, mixed in terms of sexuality as well. A very, very diverse group. It gives the church a nice feel. They come to hear her, the message, and that's what's important. We are members of the church in San Jose. Gail is on the board of the church, and I do their web pages for them. So we're pretty much into that church.

Marie: And what's the church called?

Morgan: Firelight Church of Religious Science. A small church but a very nice church.

Marie: Do you at this point have any lesbian friends who are in a biracial relationship or any people you can talk to about those issues?

Morgan: No, we really don't. Our relationship is not without its issues. I have to remind Gail every once in a while, "You're with a black woman. Things are going to come your way because you're with me." I can't say I've raised her consciousness. By being in our relationship she has raised her own consciousness about what happens in the world to people of color. She mentioned something about something happening at work with some of the people she supervises. She's a manager at a security company. I said, "You know you need to do this because you're setting up some dynamics here that are not going to be healthy." I probably wouldn't have said that ten years ago to her.

Marie: So why did you say that now?



Morgan: I felt like I had to. I felt like all the training I had been through, the diversity education training, being in affirmative action had a lot of influence on me. You can't set up these kinds of dynamics and expect something good to come out. You're setting up the wrong dynamic. And she listened and changed a few things in her relationship with the people she supervises.

Marie: Did you also feel that from your knowledge you had some authority to say this?

Morgan: Yes.

Marie: So it's a self-esteem issue, too.

Morgan: Yes, to say, "This is not going to work. This is not healthy." I cited some examples and I gave her a solution. As far as I know it worked.

Marie: Is there a particular incident from your life which epitomizes for you coming out?

Morgan: No. I've been coming out... It's a long process, a very long one.

Marie: Did you do any kind of educating of yourself about being bisexual?

Morgan: I did. I read everything I could. I would go to Herland [Bookstore] when they were still next to the Women's Health Center, when they had a coffee shop that was open. I would have coffee, and I would read everything I could. I would read online as well, articles. I would try to educate myself as to what I was getting into by opening that door wider and wider. And what it meant for me as a black woman.

Marie: Were there any books that particularly resonated for you that came from a woman of color perspective?

Morgan: Not books but I would read various magazines. They are geared towards younger lesbians. But the one I used to go and get at Herland was *Gay Black Female*. It's a ten-page little magazine. I'd read it cover to cover! Half the stuff wouldn't apply to me, because I was fifty years old. I was just in a different place in my life. But I read those magazines. And I'd go up to San Francisco and go to Good Vibrations and I'd pick up all kinds of interesting books. So there was no one particular article or book. I liked to read. I still read.



Marie: You mentioned the internet site that you first went on when you were ranging out there looking for someone, possibly. Was it a particular site?

Morgan: No. I would look at all the personal ads. I would look at the one for lady love, something like that. That how I eventually met Gail.

Marie: It wasn't a listserv. Okay, there are two other questions here. One is, would you say your years at UCSC were happy ones?

Morgan: For the most part they were happy. There were some spots that were not so happy. But for the most part they were. I gained a lot from the campus. I would not give anything for my education.

Marie: You thought it was a good education?

Morgan: Oh, absolutely. I was under the [Narrative] Evaluation System. I don't know what it's like with the grades. But the evaluation system was great. I would not trade that for anything. I wish I could go back to school. I may go back to school eventually. I think I want another bachelor's degree in computer science. I want to turn into a little computer geek.

Marie: I remembered that we had done a workshop together downtown. We had a three-day training at Stevenson, and then we did a workshop downtown for GLBT.

Morgan: We did the training for the GLBT to make them aware of the racism in the... Yes, we did it together, with Laurie McWhorter and a couple of other people came down from the Bay Area. It was called the National Coalition Building Institute.

Marie: We were trained, and then we did that. We were asked to do that. It was interesting to me that you seemed to feel so open in that group. And it was a community group, not just campus, although some people from campus came.

Morgan: Very few people from campus came.

Marie: Yes, it was a community group, and quite diverse, as I recall.

Morgan: Absolutely.

Marie: How did you feel about it?



Morgan: I felt very comfortable. For one thing, I knew the people around me except for the two people who came from the East Bay. So I knew you, and it was like no big deal.

Marie: So when you were asked, you felt comfortable to say you would do it?

Morgan: Absolutely. It fit right in. I was quite comfortable with you and Laurie. I didn't stress about it. And even not knowing the other two people. We met earlier and that was enough.

Marie: What about the three-day training at Stevenson, which was more you as a staff person with other UCSC staff people who would know you as a UCSC staff person?

Morgan: Laurie did this one exercise where you stand up and acknowledge who you are. I can't remember what that was called. Where you stand up and say bi or lesbian or... I stood up in that group.

Marie: And the question was: are you gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

Morgan: I think that was the question. Or you acknowledge who you are. We recognize all groups. And we recognize the African Americans, and you stand up and everybody gives a hand. I stood up as a bisexual woman, and there were several people from the campus who looked at me sort of in disgust. I can see their faces to this day.

Marie: Staff people?

Morgan: Yes, staff people. I stood up and just stood there, and then I sat down and I was quite comfortable.

Marie: You were comfortable about it?

Morgan: I was comfortable with myself. But I could see that they were not. They were like...

Marie: And these were people that you knew?

Morgan: Yes. One was a person whom I worked with at the college, a preceptor.

Marie: So you think that they were shocked, that they didn't know?



Morgan: I think it was more than shocked.

Marie: You said disgust.

Morgan: Yes. How could you? This is another African-heritage person. So I kind of know what that looks like and feels like.

Marie: I also wanted to ask you about when we were on the Santa Cruz Women's Health Center board together. This is a community place. So you were doing some community involvement. How did that feel to you as a black woman, as an older woman, as any of the identities that you have, as well as being bisexual?

Morgan: It was fine for me. There was enough diversity, not necessarily color, but there was enough diversity on that board, and more came on as I was leaving, I know that. But it was fine for me. I enjoyed being on the board. I wish I could have stayed. But with making the transition from Santa Cruz to Oakland, it was just impossible. I still like getting the newsletter.

Marie: It seemed like that was a time, from my position, that you were transitioning to being more out. Did you feel comfortable within that group?

Morgan: I felt like I wasn't being judged, had something to contribute to that group and they welcomed it. I felt very comfortable doing my part. I'm a good organizer. I can organize a flea. So I felt very comfortable and I think it went well.

Marie: Okay, I have just one last question, but you can throw in more as well. Imagine someone in 2070 reading this oral history. What would you like them to know about your life on campus?

Morgan: My life on campus, for the most part, was pretty good. I value the education I got. There were some little spots in there that were not so good. Overall, I would say it's been a good experience. I'm still living the experience. I'm still carrying little bits of Santa Cruz with me, the programs that I coordinated; all the stuff I learned when I was living there is still with me. It hasn't gone anywhere. I still think about Santa Cruz. I still have a little bank account there. We go down there every once in a while. If they have another woman's dance we might go down. I still have a little bit of Santa Cruz, and for the most part it's good.



Marie: Would you say you are still kind of processing what happened to you there?

Morgan: That as well. It's a lifelong process. You know, the older we get, we start remembering back, way back. It's still a process. Life *is* a process. It will always be a process until they put me in that little jar. I didn't say grave; I said *jar*. And even after that it will be a process.

Marie: Do you have anything to add?

Morgan: I'm happy. I am in a relationship with someone who I truly love. It's not without its little problems. But we are growing together. We care for each other. We respect each other. I like the work that I'm doing, although I wish I was just recruiting and talking to people. I enjoy that so much. But for the most part I am very happy. Got a dog. Got a bird. Got a little house. We try to go women's events. We go to Oakland Gay Pride. We were at San Francisco Pride in June. We did the domestic partnership ceremony there. And we are also becoming more involved in Lighthouse Community, the gay community center in Hayward, a few blocks away. I am thinking about volunteering sometime over there. They may need some computer training and I like doing that. So I think we are finding a niche. We're both working very hard. I'm thinking, when can I retire? How can I retire? Do we want to live here? Those are the things I am thinking about now. Do we want to continue doing what we are doing until we are 100 and old and cranky.

Marie: It sounds like you are very comfortable with being out there, being with Gail.

Morgan: Oh yes, I am very comfortable. And we have a good relationship. We really do. We have a lot of the same interests. She's an artist and I am creative. I'm not saying I am an artist. I like putting things together and seeing how things work and matching colors. So we do a lot of things together.