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**Crossing Borders:**  
**The UCSC Women's Center, 1985-2005**



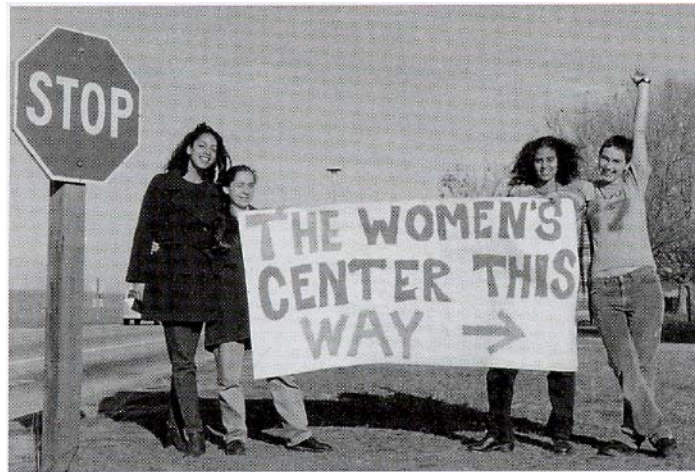
**Interviewed & Edited by Irene Reti**

Santa Cruz, California

2005

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Cardiff House. Photo by Arlyn Osborne.

# Introduction



Cowell Ranch House, late 1800s, photo courtesy of Special Collections

*We have been given by the chancellor an ideal space that stands at the border between the university and the town . . . Through the center's programming, we hope not simply to extend the boundaries between the university and the city, but to redefine—and, where possible, to eliminate—those boundaries. We hope to combine the academic with the intellectual as well as with the social and political, and, in this way, to move forward the larger educational enterprise. It is, of course, a utopian vision: a guide and a goal. We do believe it can be realized.*

—Founding Vision Statement, UCSC Women's Center, 1985

During the birth of the second wave of the feminist movement in the early 1970s, women's centers emerged on many college campuses across the United States. As Beth Willinger points out in her article "Women's Centers, Their Missions, and the Process of Change," most of these women's centers were devoted to either direct service or to feminist research.<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1985, over a decade after the first college women's centers

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<sup>1</sup>In Sharon L. Davie, ed. *University and College Women's Centers: A Journey Toward Equity* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002) p. 48.

opened their doors, the UCSC Women's Center not only contested this bifurcation between service and research, but also broadened the vision of a women's center far beyond that of most academic women's centers. From the beginning this visionary women's center saw the campus as one community and therefore sought to serve not only students, but also staff and faculty. Perhaps even more extraordinary was the goal of surmounting the borders between town and gown by serving the surrounding community as well.

In the fall of 2005, the Women's Center celebrates its twentieth anniversary. How has this original vision shifted and transformed over twenty years of history, as both the university and feminism have changed? Conceived of and completed for this occasion, this oral history volume features seven interviews with narrators who address the vision and achievements, as well as the challenges faced by the Women's Center over time. The interviews are with two of the founding faculty, Helene Moglen and Marge Frantz, as well as five staff women who served as either directors or assistant directors, or both. The significance of these interviews extends beyond UC Santa Cruz and the Santa Cruz community, for by tracing the trajectory of one women's center on one campus, we can come to a greater historical understanding of changes not only in higher education's response to feminism, but of the impact of the feminist movement itself.

The first interview in this volume is with founder Helene Moglen. Hired as a literature professor and dean of humanities at UCSC in 1978, Moglen arrived on fire with the goal of strengthening and institutionalizing the then student-run women's studies program, a vision that proved not entirely popular among the grassroots feminist students who had taken initiative in bringing women's studies to UCSC. However, it

was clear to Moglen, who well understood power structures at the university, that women's studies would not survive if it remained a student-run, marginalized program.

Moglen, who is described in this volume by her colleague Marge Frantz, as "having enormous energy," then used her considerable political acuity to establish a women's center at UCSC. Moglen's hope was that the Women's Center would become the "activist arm of women's studies," and relieve the developing women's studies program from providing a social center for feminist students, thus allowing it to focus on its academic mission. Along with several other faculty, she also founded the Feminist Research Activity (FRA), an organized research unit which funded and highlighted feminist research by faculty and graduate students. This tripartite vision established a strong foundation for a political, academic, and social feminist culture which has flourished at UCSC for years.

As dean of humanities, Moglen had a collegial rapport with then-Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer. Embroiled in the difficult town-gown relations which have plagued all UCSC chancellors, Sinsheimer understood the advantage of establishing a Women's Center which would connect the campus and the Santa Cruz community. He also was critical of the decentralized nature of UCSC, with its emphasis on the college system, and looked upon the Women's Center favorably because it would contribute to the centralization of the campus. Finally, community studies professor Nancy Shaw (now Stoller) was fighting a legal and political battle against the university. In 1982, Shaw had been denied tenure because of the feminist nature of her research.<sup>2</sup> A vocal feminist constituency on campus exerted pressure on the UCSC administration. According to

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<sup>2</sup>Nancy (Shaw) Stoller won this tenure battle in 1987, and returned to teach at UC Santa Cruz.

narrator Arlyn Osborne, it is possible that Sinsheimer supported the Women's Center partially because of these political pressures.

In September 1984 a group of faculty gathered at the Asilomar conference center in Pacific Grove to plan a women's studies curriculum, organize the FRA, and the new Women's Center. In October 1984 Chancellor Sinsheimer granted the Cardiff House to the Women's Center, and some financial support for the first three years. The founding board (called a steering committee) first met in December 1984. Director Diane Reeves was hired<sup>3</sup>, and Kathie Olsen was hired in the assistant position. In September 1985 the Women's Center opened its doors in Cardiff House.

Cardiff House is one of several historical structures acquired by the UC Regents as part of the Cowell Ranch property, a limestone quarrying/manufacturing and cattle-raising ranch operated by the Cowell family from 1865 until the early 1960s, when the University of California bought 2000 acres of the original 10,000-acre ranch for the fledgling UCSC campus. The Cardiff House was originally called the Cowell Ranch House. It was built in 1855 by Albion Jordan, who originally acquired the property in 1849. In 1865 Henry Cowell purchased the land and built an addition to the back of the house, where he lived with his wife and five children. Now 150 years old, Cardiff House is one of the oldest standing residences in Santa Cruz County. George Cardiff served as bookkeeper and manager of the ranch for forty years, and lived there with his family, which is why the house became known as Cardiff House. The Cardiff House remained the home of the Cardiffs even after the campus opened in 1965, and then in the 1970s and

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<sup>3</sup>We were unable to interview Diane Reeves for an oral history; however Kathie Olsen was interviewed about those early years.

early 1980s was used for a variety of purposes, including a temporary residence for college provosts.

Cardiff House stands at the base of the UCSC campus, near High Street, at the border between the campus and the town of Santa Cruz, a geographic location which literally and symbolically embodies the Women's Center's explicitly articulated vision of bridging the divisions between campus and community. Many of the narrators in this volume address the double-edged nature of this somewhat remote location a considerable distance from the campus core. It poses challenges for the Women's Center in terms of outreach and visibility, but also offers a "safe space" where campus women may feel freer to discuss topics such as sexual harassment and assault, affirmative action, and other feminist issues.

Highlights in programming during the first years of the Women's Center included "Celebrating Women: 20 Years of Victories, Setbacks and Challenges," an inspiring panel of feminist writers and activists, including Adrienne Rich, Sharon Maeda of Pacifica Radio, Lucille Clifton, Gloria Anzaldúa, Grace Paley, and Paula Gunn Allen. This powerful program took place February 24, 1989 at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium in front of 3000 people. A few years later (1992) Gloria Steinem and Dolores Huerta made a dynamic speaking appearance together, again at the Civic Auditorium. Both of these events exemplify the Women's Center's vision of bringing town and campus together. Other remarkable programs included the Indigenous California Women's Conference in 1992, a conference organized by a group of American Indian students that brought

female tribal elders and activists from California Indian nations across the state together for the first time in history.

Under Beatriz Lopez-Flores's direction the Women's Center built bridges with many communities of color, particularly Latinas, and helped initiate innovative campus outreach programs such as the Chicana Pipeline Project, which brought Chicanas to UCSC as prospective students. At that time Lopez-Flores was the only woman of color directing a women's center in the University of California system.

During this period the Women's Center also found itself embroiled in some of the controversial issues of the day, such as differing feminist perspectives on pornography, sadomasochism, and prostitution (sex workers). The Women's Center took the position that contributing to the dialogue about these explosive issues was an essential part of participating in a university environment.

Another accomplishment during the early years of the Women's Center was the establishment of the art gallery, which began with the involvement of students Hinano Campton and Lisa Ow, who curated a show of Asian Pacific Islander women artists called *Never in the Shadows Again*. Mentored by Osborne and with support from the art faculty, Campton and Ow wrote grants and received other funding to secure lighting and set up the gallery. The white walls of the Women's Center soon transformed into a potent space for exhibits on women and AIDS, sexual abuse, and other feminist topics. One of the most memorable exhibits was *Rocking, Red Rocking*, an interactive art exhibit that tied in the history of Cardiff House, feminism, the women who had been in the Women's Center over the years, and women's writing. The curators burned the words of women writers like Audre Lorde and Alice Walker into two red rocking chairs that sat on



the porch of the center, accompanied by recordings of women's voices. Those two exquisite rocking chairs still furnish the center's living room today, delighting a new generation of students.

After Lopez-Flores's departure in 1994 and a period of time in which Osborne served as interim director, Shane Snowdon became director in 1995 and stayed until October 31, 1999. Snowdon brought an extensive and accomplished history of feminist activism and organizing to the position. She took over as director at a time when a generation gap had opened between older "1970s feminists" and the younger generation of women, who did not always relate to the word "feminist." Much of her work centered on generating a dialogue across these generations, and empowering young women to discover what feminism might mean for them. This continued a tradition begun by Lopez-Flores and Osborne, in which the Women's Center mentored students to become leaders and organizers, rather than planning programming for them.

Snowdon's tenure was distinguished by strong student involvement and leadership in the center, as well as much innovative programming, including workshops on relationships and sexuality, nighttime hikes and rock climbing field trips that increased women's self-esteem, and the "Women of Courage" series featuring speakers like Native American activist Winona LaDuke. One of the most popular programs was an all-day workshop on women and their cars, including the basics of car repair, and how to buy a good used car.

Most recently, current director Roberta Valdez has enriched the center with her experience in politics, as well as her background in rural women's organizations, and

organizations that focused more specifically on race and class. Valdez was the only Latina elected to any position in Mendocino County during her term on the school board in the 1990s. Shaped by this experience, Valdez founded the 51% Project, an enterprise which brings elected officials such as Mayor Emily Reilly to campus to meet with students, and offers an internship program for women students interested in pursuing careers in political life. Other recent programs at the Women's Center include a conference for young women in Expanding Your Horizons in Math and Science, and a National Girls and Women in Sports Day.

At its inception, the Women's Center committed itself to serving staff women. This intention was reflected in programs such as a staff arts and crafts show, and massages for staff women. Later directors shifted away from this commitment. They expressed regret, but acknowledged that it was sometimes difficult to reach staff women because of their constricted time schedules (they wanted to go home at five o'clock and only had one hour for lunch), that staff women's needs for representation were often served by labor unions, and that funding events for staff was difficult because most of the Women's Center's funding came from student registration fees. While there were similar financial challenges in putting on events for community women, monies could often be raised from the community, particularly for large events like the "Celebrating Women" panel and speaking engagements with Gloria Steinem, or Dolores Huerta.

Nevertheless, the Women's Center also owes its success to the efforts of a large number of staff, as well as faculty, graduate students, and community members who composed a very strong board for many years. Some of these individuals include Mardi

Wormhoudt, mayor of Santa Cruz during the early history of the Women's Center, Ciel Benedetto, director of the Santa Cruz Women's Health Center, graduate student Wendy Chapkis, faculty members Gwendolyn Mink, Carolyn Clark, Sonia Alvarez, Elba Sanchez, Francisco Alarcón, Gini Matute-Bianchi, Adrienne Zihlman, and Marge Frantz. Director Beatriz Lopes-Florez described Frantz as "the most generous heart and soul of the leadership of the Women's Center." We are delighted to include an interview with her in this volume. Many other women played vital or smaller roles in the Women's Center over the years, far too many to mention here. The narrators single out "the Blue Ladies" who spent years as volunteers working and hanging out at the Women's Center, and Dorothy Healy, UCSC groundskeeper, who beautified the garden surrounding the Cardiff House. Also key to the Women's Center's success were Women's Studies Librarian Jacquelyn Marie, Rape Prevention Education Coordinator Gillian Greensite, and current board member, Valerie Jean Chase, Merrill College Assistant College Administrative Officer, who originally dreamed of this oral history as a way to commemorate the Women's Center's twentieth anniversary. At the administrative level, the backing of directors/vice chancellors of Student Services/Student Affairs Bruce Moore, Lee Duffus, Gail Heit, and most recently, Francisco Hernandez, cannot be underestimated.

Also critical to the Women's Center's success was their collaborative approach, in which a variety of campus units, and often women's organizations in the community chipped in what Osborne called "egg money" to make programming possible. This kind of web weaving also extended to outreach, such as when directors like Lopez-Flores networked with faculty like Angela Davis, who was friends with Toni Morrison, to bring

Morrison to campus as a speaker. The Women's Center also benefited from the rich Santa Cruz community, which counted among its residents nationally known feminist writers like Adrienne Rich and Gloria Anzaldúa, both of whom spoke at and were involved with the center in its early years.

Much has changed since the days Cardiff House was the center of a working ranch. In 1971, the Regional History Project conducted an oral history interview with Adalbert Wolff, who had worked as a timekeeper at the Cowell Ranch for six months in 1915.<sup>4</sup> Wolff recalled the Cowell Ranch as a huge industrial operation involving both lime production and cattle raising, not as the intimate family farm we might picture in our romantic imaginings of the past. The Cowell Ranch in Santa Cruz was but one operation of the much larger Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company based in San Francisco. Wolff lived at the Cowell Ranch House (Cardiff House) with ranch manager Frank George and his wife. I was shocked to read Wolff's recollections of the "big brute of a dog, black" named Nigger that was chained all day long right in front of the Carriage House (today University Relations), although this is entirely in keeping with the blatant racism of that time. Likewise, in another oral history Mrs. Cardiff talked about the "colored help" who "always made biscuits or cornbread and they loved to cook chicken."<sup>5</sup> The Cowells, the Georges, the Cardiffs—none of them could ever have imagined the radical lesbians, the visionary feminists of all cultures and races, the powerful women writers and artists whose voices and images fill Cardiff House today.

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<sup>4</sup>See Elizabeth Calciano, ed. *Adalbert Wolff: The Cowell Ranch, 1915* (Regional History Project, University Library, UCSC, 1972). pp. 44-45.

<sup>5</sup>See Elizabeth Calciano, ed., *George H. Cardiff: Santa Cruz and the Cowell Ranch, 1890-1964* (Regional History Project, University Library, UCSC, 1965) p. 298.

Oral history is perhaps at its most compelling when it kindles retrospection and reflection. Looking back, several of the directors commented on how much the world has changed for women in the past generation and the part the Women's Center has played in shaping that transformed landscape. Kathie Olsen said:

Those of you who are still at it, I want you to keep at it. We haven't won. We made huge strides. It is a different world than it was twenty years ago. We changed the debate and we pushed the limits. We haven't fixed it. But by God, we made big differences . . . I'm not saying we made a revolution. But we sure lit the fire of one, and we've still got the embers of it. And we better blow on it and keep going.

Shane Snowdon reflected:

I think that, unfortunately, a lot of people, as their women's centers have become less lively, have thought: 'Well, this is because young women today aren't interested in the women's movement.' They think the work is over. The Right has discredited the women's movement and made it seem unrespectable, and even repulsive, to be a feminist. So they feel like history is against them. They keep doing what they can, but they feel overwhelmed by the seeming success of the Right Wing. And I actually felt quite the reverse. In a lecture I used to give in women's studies, in Marge Frantz's class and others, I would paint a picture to the students, of the world before and after the women's movement, and I would say, 'Don't let them tell you that the women's movement has been stopped. Don't let feminists tell you that the women's movement has been stopped. . . I mean, there's still way enough work for folks to do the work that hasn't been done.' The movement is powerful. It was powerful. It can be powerful going into the future. I feel enormously hopeful.

Both Lopez-Flores and Arlyn Osborne argued that there will be a need for women's centers as long as women have not reached parity on college campuses, or in the world at large. Although great strides have been made, it is clear that parity has not been reached. Now entering its third decade, the UCSC Women's Center continues to hone and sustain the unique vision with which it began in 1985. May it continue!

These oral histories were conducted between November 2004 and June 2005. Kathleen Hughes, an invaluable member of the board of the Women's Center for many

years, conducted an oral history with Marge Frantz for this project. Hughes, a longtime activist, has worked with Frantz in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). A recent administrative reorganization placed the Women's Center and the Lionel Cantú GLBTI Center under OPERS (the Office of Physical Education, Recreation and Sports), and Hughes, as Assistant Executive Director of OPERS, is now the administrator to whom the Women's Center director reports. I thank her for her willingness to do this interview with Marge Frantz on the broader context of her development as a feminist faculty member at UCSC, as well as her involvement with the UCSC Women's Center.

I conducted the rest of the interviews. As oral histories are a co-creation of both the narrator and the interviewer, I would like to briefly describe my relationship with the Women's Center. I came to UC Santa Cruz as a student in 1978, and in 1982 earned a degree in environmental studies with a six-course concentration in women's studies. Thus I was a student in the early days of women's studies at UCSC, and in fact was in Bettina Aptheker's first *Introduction to Feminism* course in the winter of 1980. In 1988, shortly before I came to work at the Regional History Project, I was employed as an administrative assistant for the women's studies department at UCSC, during which time I worked indirectly for Helene Moglen (then chair of the women's studies program), and helped Arlyn Osborne and Beatriz Lopez-Flores put on programs that women's studies co-sponsored with the Women's Center. In 1992 my then-partner, Valerie Jean Chase, who is Cahuilla Indian, and I worked closely with the Women's Center as volunteers helping to organize the Indigenous California Women's Conference. Later, Osborne and I were members of the same women's writing group

from approximately 1996 to 2002. As the publisher of the Santa Cruz-based feminist book publishing company, HerBooks, I gave several readings at the Women's Center in the 1990s. Finally, in the winter of 2002 the Women's Center hosted my *Out in the Redwoods* internship course which trained students in oral history methodology.<sup>6</sup> I once more came to appreciate the center as a cozy and welcoming space for all women on campus and in the community. As an alum who attended UCSC from 1978 to 1982, a staff member who has worked on campus since 1986, and a member of the Santa Cruz feminist community, I clearly am no stranger to the Women's Center. On the other hand, my involvement has been peripheral enough that I have somewhat of an "outsider's perspective" as well.

Due to the tight time frame for this project (one year from inception to completion!) we were not able to conduct interviews with more of the staff, board members, and students who helped found and build the Women's Center over the past twenty years. We hope that at some future date the Women's Center will continue this documentary oral history project, perhaps on a website.

Where possible, I have footnoted the title and dates of programs discussed by the narrators in these oral histories. The Women's Center has an archive collecting many of their programs, board minutes, and other historical documents from their twenty-year history.

I would like to thank Lizzy Gray, Student Editor at the Regional History Project, who transcribed and helped edit these oral histories, and whose sharp eye and intelligence

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<sup>6</sup>This course resulted in the publication *Out in the Redwoods: Documenting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 1965-2003*. (Regional History Project, University Library, UC Santa Cruz, 2004). See also the website: <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oir.exhibit/index.html>.

enriched this project greatly. Thanks also to Vice Chancellor Francisco Hernandez, who provided partial funding for this project. Much appreciation to Annie Valva for her kind permission to include many of her fine photographs in this volume. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the warm support of the current director of the Women's Center, Roberta Valdez, who provided me with generous access to the Women's Center's archives, and helped me conceive, research, and complete this project. I would also like to express appreciation to the interviewees for their willingness to participate, and for the time they each spent meticulously reviewing and editing their transcripts.

Copies of this oral history are on deposit in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; in Special Collections and the stacks at McHenry Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz; on the Library's website; and at the UCSC Women's Center. The Project is supported administratively by Christine Bunting, head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian, Virginia Steel.

—*Irene Reti*

*Director, Regional History Project*

*October 2005*



# Helene Moglen



Helene Moglen

Photo: Sheila Namir

*Hired as the dean of humanities, professor of literature, and provost of Kresge College, Helene Moglen arrived at UCSC in 1978. From the start, she dedicated herself to strengthening the women's studies program on campus. These efforts eventually broadened into a plan to establish a Women's Center at Cardiff House. Moglen is credited by many as being the primary founder of the Women's Center, although many other faculty, staff, and community members played essential roles in bringing that vision to fruition.*

*Still going strong twenty years later, Moglen is now a key founder and director of another critical feminist institution at UC Santa Cruz, the Institute for Advanced Feminist Research. Moglen also holds the presidential chair in literature at UCSC. Her tireless efforts on behalf of women and feminism have transformed the feminist landscape at UCSC.*

*I conducted this interview on November 9, 2004, in Helene Moglen's office at Kresge College. Moglen was the first narrator interviewed for this oral history volume, and her recollections provided me with the vital background that I needed at this point in the project. —Irene Reti*

## **Early Life and Academic Career Before Coming to UC Santa Cruz**

**Reti:** We're here to talk about the events leading up to the founding of the Women's Center, and generally your impressions of the Women's Center and how things have gone. Let's start by you telling me, for background and context, where you were born, where you grew up, and when you came to UCSC.

**Moglen:** Okay. I was born in 1936 in Brooklyn, New York, and I grew up there. Then I went to Bryn Mawr College. I graduated in 1957, and then went to Yale University, where I got my Master's and Ph.D. I got my Ph.D. in 1964. After receiving my Ph.D., I taught first at New York University, and then at SUNY Purchase, and I came to UCSC from SUNY Purchase in 1978. I came as dean of humanities and arts, because the arts at that point were with the humanities.

## **Coming to UC Santa Cruz as Dean of Humanities**

After my first year, which was 1978-79, [Chancellor] Bob Sinsheimer asked me if I would also be provost of Kresge College. So I did that for the next four years while I was dean of humanities. When I stepped down in 1983, I stepped down from all of those administrative positions, and then took a year's leave. And when I came back in 1984, I agreed to come back as chair of women's studies. It was very exciting to me to put all of the administrative knowledge that I'd gotten as dean at the service of the building of this little program, which really didn't exactly exist, in the sense that we didn't have any full-time FTE. So I came back with a goal of really building feminist programs on the campus. That was what I wanted to spend the next five years doing.

**Reti:** And had you been involved with women's studies previously, either here, or before you came here?

**Moglen:** There was no women's studies program at institutions at which I had taught before, but I was very active in the second wave of feminism, considered myself a feminist, was involved in all kinds of feminist activities, and my research had taken a very strong feminist turn. I wrote and published a book called *Charlotte Brontë, the Self Conceived*, which was one of the early second wave feminist literary biographies that came out of that burst of feminism.<sup>1</sup> There were other kinds of writing that I did at that time, and have continued to do, which is certainly feminist writing. But for me, I think the one identity that I claimed from the time of the 1960s was the identity of a feminist. And that's kind of trumped all other identities for me. (laughter)

### **Building Women's Studies at UC Santa Cruz**

So when I came here Bob Sinsheimer asked me which college I wanted to belong to. I said I wanted to belong to Kresge, and he was quite disturbed, because Kresge at that time was in just all kinds of trouble. But it was where women's studies was. I said I wanted to be identified with women's studies and wanted to be at the college. At that time women's studies was a student-run program and seen as in some disarray. It really had no faculty associated with it. When I got involved with it after finishing up deaning, it was really building it from the bottom up, but also, in some ways I was seen as . . . (laughter) I was really seen as quite an arch-conservative. My sense was that there was no point having a women's studies program that wasn't part of the university. And therefore I wanted to bring it into the university, make it a university department program, ultimately a department. The students who were running it were furious. As a matter of fact, they picketed Kresge when I started that process. I got Barbara Epstein to chair. She was the good cop. I was the bad cop. I had students picketing the Kresge provost's house. I said at one point that they were giving each other five credits for peeing, and that became the sort of battle cry . . . (laughter) So that's the story.

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<sup>1</sup>Helene Moglen, (New York: Norton, 1976).

**Reti:** I just missed that era. I came here as a student the year after that. You'd already started, and people were muttering about what had happened.

**Moglen:** Oh, people were plenty mad, but what might not have been obvious was that there were a group of women running the program who had no interest in seeing re-entry women in the program, who had no interest in seeing heterosexual women in the program. It was an extremely exclusive program run through certain limited forms of identity politics. And therefore it was sort of unacceptable in a university.

### **The Vision of a Women's Center at UC Santa Cruz**

**Reti:** Okay, so now the Women's Center. At the time you were speaking of, which is about 1985, my understanding was that UCSC was the only UC campus that did not have a women's center?

**Moglen:** Right. I think it had a lot to do with our college system, and the absence of anyone in the Student Affairs office certainly, or really anyone, faculty, staff, or students to [create] a women's center. It was not an issue. Women's studies did a lot of advising for students, and the staff did (this was before Nicolette Czarrunchick came), but after Nicolette came too, there was an enormous amount of hanging out in the women's studies office and getting advice of all sorts. So one of the Student Affairs functions that women's centers had done in other parts of the system, was really being done by women's studies. Actually it was a problem for women's studies, because such a substantial part of what staff in women's studies were doing was advising, in ways that were much more appropriate to another unit. Which is one of the reasons that I thought it was important to have a women's center.

But I think that the fact that students identified centrally and importantly with their colleges, that their student affairs were in the colleges, and that women's studies

provided a feminist thing for undergraduates, made the need for a women's center not feel at all pressing to people.

**Reti:** I never would have put that together. That makes complete sense.

**Moglen:** If you looked at women's centers around the system, they were student affairs units which did a lot of the work that was being done both in our colleges and in our women's studies office. Faculty were in no way involved with those women's centers. They were really student affairs operations.

**Reti:** At one point did you start thinking there should be a women's center at UCSC?

**Moglen:** When I said I would chair the women's studies program and I got from the dean, who was then Michael Cowan (Michael succeeded me as dean), I persuaded him to give me some money. I wanted to do three different things. I wanted to get women's studies established as a strong department with FTE of its own. I wanted to start a feminist research group, which we did, the Feminist Studies FRA, for which we had a small amount of money, but it was still some funding. And I wanted to have a women's center, which, it seemed to me would both allow women's studies to begin to grow as an academic unit, and it would provide us with a place, a space for feminist activism between the campus and the community.

So I sold a group of faculty on our need for all three things, and Bob Sinsheimer, who certainly didn't know from feminism, but had hired me and was very supportive of me, I was able to persuade him that we needed a women's center. And actually I did an end run, because the Cardiff House had become empty. It had been used sort of as a holding pen for provosts before their houses were built. Several provosts lived down there, including Hermann Blake, before Oakes [College] was built; Pavel Machotka, before he took over at Porter [College]. And everybody had their eye on the Cardiff House because it's a great spot.

**Reti:** I'm sure they did.

**Moglen:** So I talked it over with my colleagues, and I wrote Bob Sinsheimer a letter and went to see him. It looked like it was going to be the beginning of a long process, which it didn't seem to me likely we would win, because there were a lot of big guns who wanted that house. I had given Bob this letter. We had a conversation and he said, "Okay. It's yours." So I got out of his office (laughter) and there was really a kind of—wow, what do I do now? And he was a man of tremendous integrity. Because as soon as word got out that he had given Cardiff House to start a women's center, there was a lot of anger and rage and protest. I was accused of doing an end run. And Bob just . . . It just rolled off him. He had made his decision. He had given it to me. End of story.

**Reti:** Why do you think he had given it to you?

**Moglen:** You know, it's very hard to say. I think he had a lot of confidence in me. I think he saw, despite the fact that feminism . . . I mean, Bob is very . . . You had to have a good explanation. You had to be pretty rational. And you had to believe that something was going to be genuinely good for the college. And I think he was concerned for the university. I think he was very concerned also to build university-community relations, which were not in good shape. And I very much emphasized that in my account, that the space was between the university and the community. It would be a way to bring women together. So I think that was extremely attractive to him. Bob was very suspicious of the colleges and the role that they had played. He was the chancellor who reorganized the colleges.

**Reti:** I remember that.

**Moglen:** So he also saw this as a way of putting certain activities, taking them out of the colleges and putting them in other spaces, which I think appealed to him. And he was a real intellectual and academic. I think the story I told him about women's studies was

pretty chilling, but not too surprising. I think he was very anxious to see women's studies become a respectable academic program. I mean, we had all kinds of evidence about which institutions around the country had women's studies programs, which journals there were. You could make the argument with Bob if you had the evidence. So I think he also bought my argument that this was a way of clarifying the role of women's studies and making it genuinely an academic program. He effectively gave me complete control in terms of what to do. I worked with a wonderful group of faculty, which included Marge Frantz, and Bettina Aptheker. It would be hard to bring it all back now. But there were a group of faculty who . . . Marta Frosch, who worked with me. But it was as usual, a small group. I was very clear right from the beginning that I didn't want it to be a Student Affairs unit, because that way it seemed to me clearly lay mediocrity. Student Affairs just sort of brings everything to the lowest common denominator. (laughter) I'm probably not being fair to Student Affairs, but that was really how I saw it.

I thought if it was going to be an original place that could initiate, could imagine itself, could conceptualize itself in whatever ways it wanted to, it needed to be free of Student Affairs, and we needed therefore to have a governing board that was not only university-connected. And that's when I asked Mardi Wormhoudt if she would co-chair the steering committee with me, and bring in community people who had weight—[like] Ciel Benedetto, who was really major in building the health movement at that time. Bringing people in from the community who would have a vision of this as a university-community activity, and that we would really work together to plan it. And indeed for several years it was an extremely effective group, and Mardi was wonderful. Mardi really showed up, despite the fact that she was the mayor of Santa Cruz and she was on the city council. Mardi always showed up. She never missed a meeting. And she was absolutely engaged in trying to make the center work. She was terrific.

So even though . . . ultimately when we hired a director, and the director did report to the Student Affairs people, Student Affairs always gave us complete autonomy. And every time they threatened not to, Mardi and I would just get a group of people together to sign letters and show up, and that was the end of it. (laughter)

**Reti:** I read in the board minutes that there was a problem with the allocation of registration fees.

**Moglen:** That's right. It was a question, since we were an independent group. We wanted to be an independent group, but we were running with registration fees. Why weren't we just a Student Affairs operation? And that was one of the early interventions that Mardi and I had to make. We went to see the then-head of Student Affairs, Bruce Moore, and we really had it out. But because we had Sinsheimer's support, it was always clear we could call him in. He really liked what we were doing. He supported us. Having Mardi co-directing was a stroke, if I may say so, of genius. (laughter)

**Reti:** Absolutely.

**Moglen:** Since there was no more important woman in Santa Cruz (laughter) than the mayor.

**Reti:** And she is such a mover and a shaker, and continues to be.

**Moglen:** Right. So we kept winning those battles. (laughter) It was a very enjoyable moment.

**Reti:** So there was a retreat at Asilomar?

**Moglen:** Right. We had a retreat at Asilomar the fall that I started to chair women's studies and that we wanted to get the Feminist Studies FRA going and the Women's Center going. And there was a great turnout of faculty. It was a wonderful turnout of



faculty, and we spent two days there. It was a retreat of a sort that people rarely have now. It was genuinely...

**Reti:** A real retreat.

**Moglen:** And that was when we planned all of this, planned how it would work, and how the FRA would be organized, what our vision was for women's studies, which was quite different from women's studies programs around the country, and all of that. So it was the retreat that brought together a group of women faculty who were doing feminist work, who would name themselves as feminists. That got everything going. We then involved graduate students very early on in the FRA. In fact the FRA was run completely democratically by graduate students and faculty, who ran all of the committees, the funding and all the rest of it. We also had graduate student representation on the Women's Center board.

**Reti:** Did you see the Women's Center as a research-oriented institution?

**Moglen:** Not centrally, no. No, my vision then was to have these three very different, but related spaces. One was women's studies, which was an undergraduate program. One was the FRA, which was the faculty and graduate student research entity. And the Women's Center was the activist arm of the feminist community, and a place where faculty, graduate students, staff, and above all, community people, could come together and plan programs, some of which might be related to research activities. But it was never intended for . . . It always seemed that for us to have done that would have been to turn it into an institute that most community people would have wanted nothing to do with.

**Reti:** Yes. The reading that I've done about women's centers in the United States discusses this division between research institutes, and more service-oriented or community-oriented centers.

**Moglen:** Yes.

**Reti:** So this definitely fell into the community-oriented category, but also had a bigger vision.

**Moglen:** Right. But there was *really* desire to have faculty involved. Faculty in those days certainly were involved. I think it was a third faculty, a third community people, a third graduate students, something like that, on our early board. Or maybe it was half and half . . . It was at the tail end of that activist moment in feminism, and I think that it was meant to be a place where faculty could enact their activism, and graduate students, with community people. And undergraduates, because of course it was a . . . And that, I think we didn't think out very well, in a way, exactly how the undergraduates would fit in. Because it was an undergraduate space, after all. I would say that of the three things the Women's Center was the least thought through. We had a wonderful space and that seemed enough initially.

The story of decorating that space is very interesting. There was nothing much to speak of by way of furniture in there. So I also had a little budget for furniture. I don't remember who the people were who were in charge of interior design and decorating. I wanted to get these sofas. And they were just . . . They didn't want anything people could, they said, "Sleep on." The homophobia was clear. They really didn't want sex to happen in the Women's Center. (laughter) It took me a while to realize what all this stuff was about sofas! (laughter)

**Reti:** (laughter) Is that why we have those little tiny sofas?

**Moglen:** (laughter) So much interesting stuff from those days. Where were we? What's the question?

**Reti:** You were saying that the Women's Center was the least thought through of the three.

**Moglen:** Right. You can sort of understand how to put a women's studies program together. And with the FRA, once we came to understand how crucial graduate students were . . . Because the first plan was to have faculty run it, and it was an utter failure. Because the faculty would show up to the first meetings and by the middle of the quarter the faculty were gone. So into that first year we brought the graduate students, and made them equally part of everything, put aside some money that they could have for research, and from then on it ran for several years just beautifully.

But how the center would work was very open, and to some extent depended upon who the people were who showed up, and of course, who the directors would be. That was utterly crucial. We worked for a year planning before we hired a director, and there are some ways in which I would say that was the best year, (laughter) because we had all this hope and this utopian craziness, you know, all these dreams of what it would be like. Then once you hired a director it was really going to be that person's function to run it. And how closely she would work with a committee of this sort, and where the points of difference could be. We were very naïve, I think, in that way.

**Reti:** How so?

### **The First Director of the Women's Center**

**Moglen:** Well, I think that we probably each had some image of what a director would be, the kind of person. I think certainly the faculty probably imagined it to be someone who was really an intellectual, who would be comfortable with faculty, even though she wouldn't be a faculty member. And I'm sure the community people had another whole image, maybe different kinds of images. But then, it was not a very well-paying job, after all. It was not a major job. There still isn't any way that people get prepared to be

women's center directors, except for the few who have been women's center directors. So who wants to be a women's center director? You didn't want a kid. You didn't want a recent graduate. You wanted someone with administrative experience, etc. Our first director was a disaster. If you ask, as one of your questions did, how did you appoint her, I would be hard-pressed to say. We had almost no applicants.

**Reti:** Why?

**Moglen:** It was not a well-paying job. And I think it was not a very clearly defined job. It may be that some people saw themselves as potentially caught in a peculiar situation. I think there were some people probably who were used to working as student affairs officers, who would have been very comfortable going into a student affairs situation, which this wasn't. This had a very anomalous structure. The very structure that we believed in so much also, I think, made the job very weird for prospective women's center directors who might have come out of student affairs programs.

**Reti:** Because of this notion of bridging the community and the university?

**Moglen:** Because of that vision. And because we had a very strong board. After all, I had been a dean. There was Mardi the mayor. Groups of faculty. Strong women from the community. What *were* people coming into? How much leeway would they have? How much autonomy would they have? I would think that was part of it. That, plus the salary. It was a job that looked like a job . . . If a women's center was really going to work people had to be very available.

People with a lot of experience would probably have wanted more contour. And I have to say, I cannot even remember very much about Diane Reeves, except that she turned out to be quite conservative, and quite stiff. There was a lot of struggle right from the very beginning with the advisory board, and she only stayed for a year. I think it was very clear very fast that she was the wrong choice, and that we didn't want her to stay,

and that she wasn't . . . She was very white. She was very heterosexual. She was very middle class. I don't think we had any choice. I think it came down to Diane or not . . . And so we hired her. That was our first real setback.

**Reti:** That sounds pretty hard. You were just starting out.

**Moglen:** I mean, it was clear that somehow . . . We were working at a very utopian level, and the director was utterly crucial. And especially crucial if you wanted to bring in a heterogeneous group of students, if you wanted the lesbians to be comfortable, older and younger women to be comfortable, women of color to be comfortable. It was clear that this was just an absolutely screwed up choice we had made. And it wasn't as though anybody really wanted it. With hindsight, we should have waited. We should have not been so . . . There was always that fear that if we didn't start, if we didn't get it open right away . . . There were enough people wanting the house.

**Reti:** You had to just do it. It's like squatters rights.

**Moglen:** Right. We really needed to get it going. If memory serves, that was why we hired her, hoping it would work out, but feeling that we really needed to hire somebody.

**Reti:** Did it hurt the Women's Center when after a year you had to look for a new director?

**Moglen:** Well, I would have to say that that year was a non-starter year in some ways. There wasn't enough that happened, I think, for there to have been very much disappointment. But I also have to say, and this is related to another question that I think you probably want to ask about the choice of putting the Women's Center where it was.

### **Cardiff House as a Location for the Women's Center**

**Reti:** Yes, I do want to talk about that.

**Moglen:** I think it was in fact wrong. (laughter) I think probably making that decision, and that very thing that seemed like such a triumph when we got it, was in fact the wrong decision. Now I think people know where the Women's Center is, and people do show up for things. But it still is not a space where, for example, undergraduates go to hang out. It never served that function where . . . what we imagined as the place where we ultimately would have an advisor, where we would have . . . that would be filled all day long with undergraduates coming and going, really having their space.

I had been in the Women's Center at Brown University before we started this, and that was my image of a good women's center. It was funky. It was filled with old furniture. And it was filled with girls, and women. Stuff was happening. It was really a churning place. That never happened here. It still hasn't happened. One's feeling when one goes into the Women's Center now, and has been for years, is it is usually fairly empty during the day, unless there's a meeting. There are scheduled meetings during the day. There are meetings at night. But other than those meetings, the place has never exactly come alive. I think it's just too far from everything. This campus is decentralized as it is. People tend to hang out in their colleges, in places sort of designated for that, or places that allow that. And it's the same way that the Student Center never worked. Years after they built this campus, which may have been planned in response to the [political turmoil of the] sixties . . . That's sort of the rumor, right?

**Reti:** Yes, there's always been that rumor.

**Moglen:** A place where you can't have any center, where you can't have any protests that work. But then when they put the Student Center in, and that's far more available in a way, because it's on the way back and forth from the library, it was never used. It was always an empty space. So in some way the Santa Cruz colleges are the destiny of the institution. I think you really need to have spaces that are going to work for undergraduates in the colleges. That was our mistake. With hindsight, we would have

been much better off having a larger space at Kresge, where the women's studies program was. It might have worked a lot better.

Now, it wouldn't have worked in terms of the community. See, and that was . . . We set up a very real tension. I mean, it was a real tension, between the faculty and the students on one side, and the community on the other. Had we had space on the campus, there's no way it would have become a community space. Even after we began to think, you know, this probably didn't make a lot of sense, we wouldn't give it up, because we didn't want to give up the vision of the community. But the community never comes there during the day. They come also for events and meetings.

**Reti:** Well, what I hear from community people who are not familiar with the campus, is they get very confused about where it is. If that road from High Street had been opened that would have made a huge difference. It would have been a shame, because it's a beautiful space to put a road through.

**Moglen:** Yes, but there is a driveway already there, which they could have used. But not for large amounts of traffic.

**Reti:** Was that ever explored?

**Moglen:** Yes, but they wouldn't allow us to use that road. And there may have been some . . . I don't remember now what backed that up, but it was not an option for us.

**Reti:** I came across something in the minutes from later, I think about 1990. There was some discussion of moving to the Redwood Building.

**Moglen:** Well, there was always that tension throughout. And I would say there still is. I don't think it's changed. The Women's Center certainly has been very successful in many ways. I think the programming is extremely successful. Starting with Beatriz, [Lopez-Flores] we began to have real programming there. Beatriz attracted a much more diverse

group of students. It was very important to the Chicano/Latino population on campus. They really had a space. Starting with Beatriz and Arlyn [Osborne], I do think it became an active, functioning space, and very successful in its way. It was not quite what we had imagined. It was not quite a hang-out space, and not exactly a space where university and community people came together, except for specific events. But they didn't come together much for planning, for initiating. More as audiences. And I think that's useful. I think it served a very important function, and a much better function than on any other campus in the UC system. It has appeal to a larger group. It's been a vital space. But there were some things that that location didn't allow, at the same time that there were some things that it facilitated. I keep thinking I should give them money for lighting. The lighting is terrible. But having a place where there's a kitchen . . . It's lovely to have a house to go into, that nobody's living in, and that you can use. We reserve it as much as we can for events. The outdoor space in good weather is really wonderful.

**Reti:** But I can see that the location is a mixed bag. When you say that you think it was much better than other UC campuses, you are talking in terms of the outreach to the community?

**Moglen:** In terms of the outreach to the community. I think just in terms of the events that it has managed to have. The political nature of it. The fact that it has remained political in different ways, depending on the director, different definitions of politics. It has been an activist space. On the other campuses, my understanding is that that women's centers have mostly closed. Some of them became men and women's centers, student centers. There was that whole thing. But they are very minor. [UC] Berkeley had a brief period when Margaret Wilkinson was chair, when they were doing some interesting things. But the other women's centers, at least as far as I understand it, are either defunct or dead in the UC system. I think ours may be the last one to really be functioning as a women's center.<sup>2</sup> The structure of our women's center kept us alive.



**Reti:** Let's go back to the open house for the Women's Center. What are your memories of that? It was in 1985. There were some pictures that I saw of it and it looked like it was jammed full of people.<sup>3</sup>

**Moglen:** You mean our first big party?

**Reti:** Yes.

### A Moment of Possibility

**Moglen:** Well, people really showed up. It was a certain kind of dream. There was a sense that feminism was coming alive on the campus, not that it hadn't existed. We couldn't have done the things we did if there wasn't a strong feminist movement. But it was being focused in different ways, and there were such high hopes for the center and for that vision at the time. It was sort of the end of that sixties, seventies [milieu], right? It was the end. So there was a real hope that somehow out of that could come something that reflected what we had learned and could harness . . . There's always been this division within women's studies between the activist and the intellectual. If you look at any women's studies program in this country you can see how that struggle has been fought, and very different decisions have been made about it. I think that having a Women's Center made us feel that somehow we could be freer to develop the more academic program in women's studies, and insist on feminist activism as part of our program, part of our campus, a crucial aspect of our feminism. That's how we enacted the split. So the opening of the Women's Center was a real moment of anticipation. Everything was ahead. The house. The promise. The feminist community. It was a wonderful moment of possibility.

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<sup>2</sup>. UC San Diego and UC Santa Barbara and UC Riverside have women's centers. UC Irvine's women's center opened in 1973, and is now called the Center for Women and Men. UC Davis has a Women's Resources and Research Center. UC Berkeley has a Gender Equity Resource Center. UC San Francisco has a Center for Gender Equity.

<sup>3</sup>.The open house for the Women's Center happened on September 27, 1985.

**Reti:** Was that vision threatening to the powers that be?

**Moglen:** (laughter) It sort of depends who you talk to. It certainly was not threatening to Bob Sinsheimer. I remain, and always will be in Bob Sinsheimer's debt, because he was never threatened by that. And I think for most of the powers that be, the fact that the Women's Center was off campus . . . Nobody really knew much about it. It was sort of a little bit the heart of darkness.

But when women's studies faculty went for recognition as a department, and we met with the academic vice chancellor, who was then Kivie Moldave, Moldave kept adding more and more men to the meeting. There were a group of women, maybe there were six or seven women who were coming, eight, nine, I don't know, women coming to the meeting. And he filled this room with men. He kept adding more and more men. I have to say they were terrified. Somehow the idea of a group of angry women who wanted something was terrifying! Angry faculty who wanted something. Not staff, who could be kept in their place. But faculty, and senior faculty.

We couldn't believe it. There was no room to stand in that room, no less sit, he had filled it with so many men. And they did not want to give us departmental status. I don't think that the Women's Center ever provoked that kind of fear and anger, because it never mattered. It never threatened other people's resources. It was just too far away. I think nobody cares really . . . Nobody who is not in Student Affairs cares about Student Affairs. Student Affairs is the feminized unit of the campus. Its role is to keep students quiet and happy. And to some extent that is the way the Women's Center was seen. The only time we really threatened people is when we got the house, because the house people wanted. But everything else—it was handled through registration fees—who cared about it?

## Serving on the Women's Center Policy Board

**Reti:** In terms of your involvement on the board . . . You continued to be on the board for quite a few years after the initial period?

**Moglen:** I did for quite a few years. I worked very hard at the center for a number of years. I would say probably for about ten years I was extremely active. It was something I did a lot. I always showed up for meetings and did what I could. But increasingly, and I think Mardi and I both felt . . . because Mardi also stayed through a lot of that. Increasingly though, through Beatriz, and then Shane [Snowdon] was hired . . . increasingly we sort of felt that the board was a kind of window dressing. When there was a battle to be fought we would be called in, and we would show up somewhere to protest and argue for something, but there was less and less function for the board. That started to be true when Shane was there. We really tried to get things back on track. But I think Shane . . . One of the problems with all of the directors of the center, because they are not faculty themselves, is this certain ginger way in which they approach faculty. They are afraid faculty don't want to do anything. They feel they are intruding, but they also feel somehow defensive. So unless the faculty are willing to play a very active role, and sort of organize themselves and one another, the faculty become less and less significant. Shane is a very intelligent person, and certainly could . . . I mean, Bea had a group of faculty working with her quite effectively, I think. But Shane, I think, really didn't quite know how to use the board, was quite defensive, and I think we all started pulling away. By the time Roberta [Valdez] came there was really no function for the board, and that was when I left. I went to some meetings that Roberta had and there was nothing to talk about. It was as though she was trying to think of ways of to amuse the board. She was very warm. She was very welcoming. She had meals, etc. But there was no function. I didn't have enough time to play that role. There was just no point in it any more. And that was when I withdrew.

**Reti:** In the archives I found a statement that stated that “the relationship with the Women’s Center policy board could be seen as dialectical rather than hierarchical.” I thought that was very interesting.

**Moglen:** Well, I think that there really was a desire to work through feminist process. We took on everything. Gillian Greensite from Rape Prevention [Education] was on it. Olga Euben. I mean, there were a lot of strong personalities with very strong opinions.

**Reti:** Yes, I noticed that. These must have been some meetings! (laughter)

**Moglen:** We would argue. I remember one meeting when we talked about whether men should be allowed in the center. We were going through that. And then Beatriz, I think, wanted to make some money by renting the house out for weddings. There was another whole thing about that. I mean, there were continual struggles. But there was no boss. Mardi and I co-chaired for many years. But we were never the boss. We became sort of figureheads in a certain way. Marge Frantz was on the board all those years. All the decisions were made collectively, and they were made with the director. But they were collective decisions. And we never saw the Student Affairs unit as our bosses. They were certainly not our bosses, and we were there to prevent them from being the bosses of the directors. We understood the tension that the director had. But we protected the director, in a sense, from being co-opted. And in that way the structure worked.

**Reti:** That’s brilliant.

**Moglen:** It was a very good structure from that perspective. But once the directors didn’t know what to do with the board, and really wanted to run the center themselves, which was true of Shane and probably true of Roberta, there was . . . A lot of people don’t want to do something that isn’t going to make a difference.

## The Inevitability of Change

I also have to say that it's inevitable that institutions change. And I don't have any, and didn't when I left . . . I have no feeling of bitterness about that. It seemed to me we made certain kinds of choices, some of which were good, some of which were bad. We were feeling our way. And it was a Women's Center for that moment. What the Women's Center became inevitably was different. It had to be different.

**Reti:** As the institution evolved.

**Moglen:** Right. And there was no way that the same people needed to have any say in it at all any longer. Roberta and I have started now to work more together, because I'm the head of this institute, and we use the Women's Center for some of our events. We use their mailing list; she uses ours. We collaborate more than I think there's been collaboration for several years.

**Reti:** Are you still involved in women's studies?

**Moglen:** No, I quit the board. But I think it's another interesting example of the way in which programs change. I was pretty central in building women's studies, in getting FTE for it. Then at a certain point the balance changed, and there was a group of young faculty who really didn't want the older faculty who had this sort of peculiar connection to women's studies around. We all taught a course. But we were really devoted to the executive committee. I was on the executive committee for twenty years. And then these younger people wanted us off. As soon as that happened my sense was, of course. They have to go their own way and shape their own program, and it's no wonder.

## Serving a Diverse Constituency

**Reti:** Well, getting back to who the Women's Center was serving. Who do you think it left out? I know you were saying there were problems with the Cardiff House and reaching the community, but particular groups of women.

**Moglen:** Well, Beatriz was wonderful in bringing the Chicana/Latina students in. I don't know that African American students have ever felt particularly comfortable, or as comfortable. I think that's a population . . . And after Beatriz, I'm not sure to what extent . . . I'm not sure who . . . Certainly that's remained a problem. I think lesbian and straight women have felt comfortable at the Women's Center. I think that that has not been a divide, despite the sexuality of the directors. That has not been a problem. I don't know whether Asian students come around much, and whether they feel . . . It's a very large group. I know there are some Asian students and Asian American students who do come around. But what I would have to say is, I don't really know very much about the Women's Center anymore. I really don't know much about it.

**Reti:** Right. Well, I'll be interviewing all of the directors so that picture will emerge over time.

**Moglen:** I think the faculty have ceased to have any identification with it. There may be a few exceptions, but that's my sense. Staff never affiliated, despite our desire to bring staff in. I think that at five o'clock staff, by and large, want to go home. I don't think that we ever really gave them a good reason not to. We tried various things. We tried happy hours. But very few staff came around. The staff who served on the policy board, people like Olga Euben and Gillian [Greensite], who were doing feminist things, and things for women . . . But more largely we never attracted staff. It's interesting. It would have taken a few staff women who were very committed to have organized that. I think it was possible. I don't think that it by nature didn't . . . But somehow it just didn't jell.

**Reti:** I know a few staff people who have been involved over the years.

**Moglen:** And I don't know how many community people are really . . . Again, I think people come to events. But there are many more people who see the Walnut Avenue Women's Center, I would guess, as a place to go.

**Reti:** It's downtown.

**Moglen:** It's downtown. Sure, right. They work much more with younger people. But they have some programs for older people, and I think it just is . . .

**Reti:** I know there was an effort to reach out to South County in the early years.

**Moglen:** There was. Particularly when Beatriz was here there was. And again, we did some of that through the board, and Beatriz did some of that definitely through her programming. Beatriz was a very energetic programmer, really energetic. She did try all kinds of things, and the center was much more vital at that time, I would say.

### **The Trajectory of Feminism**

**Reti:** Well, that brings me to a larger question I have about the trajectory of feminism as a whole, and the vitality of the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s, which is the period Beatriz was here, versus now. At this point do we have a need for a women's center? That's a provocative question.

**Moglen:** Well, it is a provocative question. I would say that Beatriz was here . . . part of Beatriz's time was here was after feminism had already begun to wane, and in fact it was quite terrific that she kept things going as energetically as she did, because by that time the Feminist Studies FRA was gone. That kind of died in the late 1980s, because faculty really wanted to go back to their departments, and there was much less felt need for a kind of bonding among women faculty.

This thing that I'm doing now is a real effort to resurrect a lot of what . . . I'm sort of an old horse. I've been drawn to the same old trails again and again. (laughter) The Institute for Advanced Feminist Research started to come together right after 9-11. The faculty who have organized it with me were very clear that they didn't want it to be just another academic institute, that they really wanted feminist work to matter. They wanted an institute that would be both academic and activist. And that's what we've done. I got a presidential chair, which pays us for three years for the organization. I've been funded by the humanities division. So we've had some good funding. We're building university-community projects in a way that we've never done before in the feminist community here. But we're doing it very actively. I mean, we're doing projects and we're seeking money for the projects.

I would say that I'm encountering a resurgence of feminist energy in faculty. Possibly graduate students. I'm not ready to say that yet. Graduate students in those early days were really amazing. I'm not sure about that. Certainly the faculty. There are enough feminist courses around campus that I can't help but think we must be really producing a lot of feminists on this campus. I have no question about that. My courses certainly attract students who are feminists. So I don't know what to say about the trajectory of feminism. The trajectory of some forms of feminism has been down. But at the same time, the trajectory of other forms of feminism is definitely up. There's one project we're doing. We're doing a documentation project in which we're getting young women, hoping more of high school age, and older women, women in their fifties, sixties, seventies etc., to interview one another about coming to political consciousness.

**Reti:** Oh, that's so great!

**Moglen:** And trying to figure out what "political" means to these different generations, and through this process hoping to build a kind of feminist alliance in this community where people are truly working in the interests of one another, and identifying with the



needs of one another. We're doing this project in English and Spanish. So we're really pulling in South County. That's our intention. We're hoping to raise quite a lot of money for it.

So you know . . . dreams don't die. They get reborn in different forms. I think that in this incarnation we'll be able to do some things that we wanted to do but didn't even quite understand twenty years ago. And other things won't work, but twenty years from now, who knows? It's really necessary to take a very long view. There's no way that feminism is dead. If Bush brings in judges now who are going to vote against abortion, I think we're going to see a resurgence of feminism that is going to be very surprising. I believe a lot of young women don't even understand why it's an issue! I had an illegal abortion. Almost every woman of my generation had an illegal abortion. People just don't understand what that's about. And once that knowledge comes back, it's amazing how that's going to focus the feminist mind.

So I remain extremely optimistic about feminism and about spaces like the Women's Center, women's studies, institutes, etc. I think they are wonderful spaces. You create them and things happen in them. And you have to be willing to give them over to other people, who will then make them in the image that they have. And that's right. That's appropriate. If you try to hold on to them, forget it. You can't do that. My image for the Women's Center is no longer relevant to the Women's Center. As a matter of fact I don't even know what that would look like now. So now I have another image for another space, which is another kind of women's center. It doesn't have the same kind of physical space.

**Reti:** It doesn't have walls.

**Moglen:** It's an intellectual and political space.

**Reti:** I had never realized just how activist the vision of the Women's Center was and still is. Now we have all of these student resource centers, and the idea is to serve students on campus. But originally there was a problem with retention of women students, particularly in the sciences. It seems like part of the original impetus for the women's centers at some universities was to serve women students so that they would be able to stay in school.

**Moglen:** Absolutely. And look, my son's partner is the founding director of a women's center. She started it three years ago at Lehigh University, where the need for a women's center is unbelievable. I mean, this is a fraternity, sorority school where date rape is just rampant, where girls . . . I mean, it's really extraordinary! And with a large engineering school and business school where women in no way feel themselves to have equal access. Santa Cruz was never in that sense a place that *needed* a women's center, if you see what I mean. This is the story of this particular Women's Center, and this is a very special place for feminists. And it may also be one of the reasons that it never exactly "took" in a major way. Because people have Bettina's [Aptheker] course, right? People have all sorts of ways to raise consciousness, to be advised, feminists in the counseling center. Gillian Greensite. I mean, this is a place that's just full of resources for women, as it turns out.

**Reti:** Is there anything you'd like to add?

**Moglen:** No, it was fun talking. Reminiscing is fun. Oral history is a good thing.

**Reti:** Well, thank you so much, Helene. It's really inspiring. I'm learning a lot.



Sonia Alvarez, Marge Frantz, Helene Moglen (Left to Right). Photo by Annie Valva. All Rights Reserved.

## Marge Frantz

*Marge Frantz was interviewed by Kathleen Hughes at her home in Santa Cruz, California. Marge was a founder of the Women's Center, and served on the board for many years. Beatriz Lopez-Flores called her "the soul of what the Women's Center strived to be." Marge contributed her long history as an organizer—extending back to her activism with the Communist Party in the 1930s and the student movement in the 1960s—to her work with the Women's Center. In addition, she was able to bridge ideological gaps within the feminist community, as well as gaps between the academy and the community, between staff and faculty. Nearly all of the interviewees credited her with being a significant influence and resource. This brief interview with Marge reflects her typical modesty and tendency towards understatement, but it provides a taste of the deep and salty wisdom she has contributed to the center and to the UCSC campus*

—Irene Reti

## Early Background

**Hughes:** Marge, let's start today by talking about your life before you came to UCSC. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

**Frantz:** I was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1922. I went to Radcliffe College for a couple of years and dropped out, and then got involved in the early civil rights movement and the labor movement in Birmingham, where my father was very active. I worked on a number of jobs. At one point I decided to go back to college, in 1947, at Chapel Hill, but as it turned out their out-of-state quota was full. They told me just to take three courses and I could get credit for them. If I took the exams and did all the work I could pick up the credits the following year, although I wasn't admitted. What happened was that I never did because in December that year Henry Wallace announced he was running for president. I dropped everything and went to work on the Wallace campaign. So I didn't go back to college then.

I came to California in 1950, and I had several jobs, ending up at the University of California, Berkeley as a senior editor at one of the research institutes, the Institute of Industrial Relations. I was there during the free speech movement in the sixties. Berkeley was a very exciting town. I started auditing classes. In connection with the free speech movement the students began putting out a booklet about faculty and recommending classes and dis-recommending classes. John Schaar, who taught political theory, always got great recommendations, so I started auditing his classes. I just loved them! I was looking for political answers at that point because I had left the Communist movement, which I had been part of for many years. So I got fascinated with Schaar's classes.

Then [came] the People's Park incidents in Berkeley. The university, I felt, was behaving outrageously in connection with a student struggle to use university land as a park. They ended up putting a big fence around it, and arresting people, and calling out the national guard. It was a major struggle. I got furious with the way that the university behaved, because the publisher of the *San Francisco Chronicle* had come up with an offer to buy the land and sell it to the university. It was a way to settle the whole thing.

**Hughes:** It was a good way?

**Frantz:** I thought it was a good way. It was certainly better than anything so far. And the university just dismissed it out of hand.<sup>1</sup> I was at home that morning working, editing some articles. I heard this on the radio. Just at that moment, I got a phone call from my boss saying, "Could you please speed up the editing? I want to go on vacation at such and such a time." I said, "I'm not ever coming back until that fence comes down. Goodbye." So I quit. I had no plan whatsoever (I had always worked) of what I was going to do. But I was really upset by what was going on. I decided that I would continue to audit Schaar's classes and do the reading, because I never had time to do the

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<sup>1</sup>The People's Park protest was one of the landmark events in the student activist movement of the 1960s. UC Berkeley bought a plot of land on Telegraph Avenue in 1968 and tore down dwellings inhabited by Berkeley's radical activists and members of the counterculture, with the intention of building student residence halls and a parking lot. In response, at the urging of *The Berkeley Barb*, hundreds of people occupied the park, planting trees, flowers, and grass, constructing playground equipment and distributing free food. On May 15th ("Bloody Thursday") then-governor Ronald Reagan was quoted as saying, "If there has to be a bloodbath, then let's get it over with." That day, law enforcement tried to reclaim the park, and fired teargas and buckshot at the thousands of protestors, killing one and blinding another. The National Guard was called in, and for days, the streets were barricaded while they sprayed teargas on protestors and non-protestors alike.—Adapted from the *Wikipedia* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People's\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People's_Park).

reading. I decided to spend a whole year doing that just for fun. And at the end of that year (I had a wonderful time), Schaar announced he was leaving Berkeley and coming to [UC] Santa Cruz. I felt like the rug had been pulled out from under me. So I decided, partly pushed on by my partner, to go back to college and get my degree. I think I was forty-eight at the time. I spent the next two years getting my degree, getting Phi Beta Kappa, getting all A's, etcetera. I was very lucky because I was able to work with Hannah Pitkin, who was also a marvelous teacher of political theory.

### **Coming to UC Santa Cruz**

I finished my degree and came down to UC Santa Cruz to do graduate work with John [Jack] Schaar. I had no intention of teaching whatsoever, but did become a TA in Jack's class. After the first time I TA'd he came over (I was renting a house right across the road from him) and said, "You know, you've got quite a reputation as a teacher. Why don't you [teach]?" In those days you could teach classes once you were advanced to candidacy. The colleges were offering classes right and left. So I had the idea of teaching a class on the 1930s. I didn't want to teach political theory. But I had the idea of teaching a class on the 1930s because the young grad students, the young radicals of that period, I thought, had totally the wrong idea about the 1930s. They simply brushed off the thirties, which was an amazing decade of labor organization and political activity, as Roosevelt "saving" capitalism. That's all they noticed about the thirties. I thought that was so wrong.

So I developed this course on the history, literature, and culture of the 1930s. It's a wonderful period to talk about because there are so many interesting things happening.

I had a marvelous time. It was the first class I ever taught. It was a Merrill [College] course and students had to evaluate it. I got very enthusiastic evaluations. From then on I could teach anything I wanted. Then I thought, well, I'd like to teach a course on McCarthyism.

**Hughes:** So you became a teacher in certain categories, and then you moved your way to *Women in Radical Social Movements*, which probably got you close to the Women's Center.

**Frantz:** Yes. Jack went away for a year and I had to find somebody else to TA for. So I TA'd for Barbara Epstein, then called Easton. She asked me if I wanted to do a lecture. First I TA'd in *Recent U.S. History* for her. She asked me to do a lecture and I said, "Sure. What about?" She said, "Anything you want." I said, "I'll do one on McCarthyism." I did this lecture, and I realized I could teach this whole course on McCarthyism. So I started doing that. Then the next quarter I TA'd for a course called *Women in U.S. History*. And I didn't know anything about women in history. I'd never had any women's history when I went to college earlier, even though I went to a women's college.

**Hughes:** What year would this be, then?

**Frantz:** This would have been 1977, 1978. So again she said, "You can do a lecture about anything you want." I said, "I'll do one about women in the Progressive period," because I knew a lot about the Progressive period and I was very interested in it. Well, I discovered this incredible movement of women in the Progressive period, which I didn't even know existed. I mean, I'd heard about Margaret Sanger but I didn't really know anything about it. I read a piece in a little book by June Sochen about Crystal Eastman; it

was just fascinating because it sounded like a replay of the whole contemporary women's movement, what was happening in 1890-1900. I then discovered Blanche Wiesen Cook was writing a book about Crystal Eastman. Then I read about the women who opposed the First World War, and the beginnings of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the whole period, it just came to life! There was a huge split in the suffrage movement. All this fascinating stuff was happening! It was almost like the sixties again, fifty years earlier. So I decided to teach a course on the New Woman. First, Barbara went away for a year and I taught the *Women in U.S. History* course for the history department, and then I taught this course on the New Woman. And the New Woman course morphed into, over time, *Women in Radical Social Movements*. First I taught it as a seminar, and then it became a lecture class.

I co-taught this class with Ellen Rifkin, a graduate student in the literature department. She did some research and she found some wonderful short stories about women in this period. There were these wonderful short stories about people by Mary Wilkins Freeman, whom I'd never heard of, but most people who study women's literature know her name. And Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a marvelous story of hers. We had about six or eight short stories in our reader. They were terrific. It was really fun to dig those up.

### **Developing Women's Studies**

In the meantime Helene Moglen arrived at Santa Cruz in 1979. She came as the dean of humanities, and one of her big goals was to get a women's studies program started. There already was an informal women's studies program on the campus that was run by



a few students. There was a group of women led by Karen Rotkin [formerly Karen Ryan] and others. She has since died but she was then Mike Rotkin's wife. They had organized a women's studies program, and they got Professor May Diaz to give it some official sanction through Kresge College. Helene wanted to make it a regular department. She was really the founding parent. First she had to take "control" of this women's studies program away from the students and put it in the hands of the administration. She gave Barbara Epstein that job. That was not Barbara's greatest skill, so she basically enlisted me. I had to try and talk these women into giving up their power.

**Hughes:** Wow, that must have been . . .

**Frantz:** It was really weird.

**Hughes:** Did you have any ethical issues with that?

**Frantz:** No, not really. Because I knew that as long as the students were running it, it would never have the kind of status and resources to grow. It would just be a small group. Whereas if it became an official administrative program it would flourish, and we could get more faculty.

**Hughes:** Right, but wasn't co-opting a big concern?

**Frantz:** Yeah. It was a struggle. Two people ended up being furious with me but the rest of them went along.

**Hughes:** And how long did that process take?

**Frantz:** It was basically a quarter or two. So anyway, they lost their power to plan and do the whole thing, but I still did not think it was the wrong thing to do. Because it was clear that we needed university money. We weren't going to get it any other way. May Diaz by that time had moved on. She wasn't head of Kresge [College] anymore and she wasn't there to protect it.

**Hughes:** So it moved from a student-run entity to more of a university-sanctioned program.

**Frantz:** And we hired Donna Haraway. I became part of the unofficial [women's studies] faculty because I was already teaching this one course.

### **Founding the Women's Center**

**Hughes:** Then how did the Women's Center grow? Was that part of Helene's vision, to have a women's studies program and a women's center?

**Frantz:** The women's studies program came first. Then Helene went to Sinsheimer and went after [Cardiff House]. I don't know how she pulled it off. She had *enormous* energy and drive when she first got here. She still does, but she had huge . . . She was like a train.

**Hughes:** Besides the energy, was she just fearless and bold, and didn't care if she ruffled people's feathers?

**Frantz:** Well, a lot of the male faculty was just furious with her because she had the power as the dean of humanities. Helene was extremely supportive and kind to me.

**Hughes:** Did Helene come to you and say, "Okay, listen, now that we've done *x, y,* and *z,* we need to establish a women's center?"

**Frantz:** [Helene] did ask me to be on [the board]. I was on the board that decided on the first and second directors. In fact, I was on every selection committee for the director of the board until the most recent one. But I had absolutely nothing to do with dreaming up the vision of the Women's Center, except that I was on the initial group that came together and I contributed to it. It wasn't my idea to start with.

But here's what happened, I think. Helene, for the first time, got all the women faculty together. She decided we should go down to Asilomar together. I sort of thought it was a slight boondoggle. I didn't see why we couldn't meet here. But in fact I was wrong about that, because it turned out to be a real bonding experience. One night we started talking about sexual harassment of young women when they were in grad school, and every person in the room except me, as they went around the room, had a sexual harassment story from when they were graduate students. I was blown away because I didn't know anything about all that. So Helene took that on as one of her big causes.

In a way, getting the faculty together at Asilomar was sort of the seed that started the Women's Center. But I don't really know that. I don't remember a moment when we said, "Let's start a women's center." But I'm sure it was Helene. She was the mother of everything that happened about women around here.

## Other Feminist Activism at UC Santa Cruz

Before she came, I did do one thing. I started reading about the Take Back the Night marches that were happening other places. Students wanted to get together to have a Take Back the Night march and rally, and they asked me to be the main speaker. I had never really studied women's issues at that point. I just went and hit the books for a week and read everything I could read and wrote a speech. (laughter) We were going to meet at Stevenson [College] and there was a bomb threat that got called into the police so we had to move over to Cowell [College] or something. But anyway, I made the keynote speech. That was my first action, except for the New Woman class.

But it took a while to make me a convert to putting women's issues first because in my radical history I had been in the Communist party and I'd been in the South, and every person was so valuable and there was no discrimination against women in the movement in the South. I had never had to face any kind of second-class citizenship within the Party, although other people had in other areas, but not where I was. I was trained as an organizer from day one. I started when I was thirteen and fourteen. I had a lot of organizational experience and ability. I was useful to organizations because I had this organizational experience. So Helene asked me to be on the steering committee or whatever it was. I remember the meeting where we talked about who should be the first director.

**Hughes:** When you were talking about how useful you were as an organizer, I would say that that was an understatement!

**Frantz:** Well, I've done it for years, so I had natural ability in that area and some experience. People were working on educating me on women's issues. Not just Helene, but also my fellow graduate students, especially my friends Ellen Rifkin and Lorraine Kahn. I thought some of the issues people were talking about were off the wall. There was a huge, huge fight about the usage of "man" as a generic term for people. I'd grown up with that all of my life and though the word was "man," I'd always thought: "men and women." It never occurred to me that that left women out. I thought it was unfortunate, but I didn't think it was the prime thing to fight about. It just didn't seem worth it. Probably I was wrong. But in terms of the priority of that issue, I got in a long discussion when I was teaching for Jack, with Lorraine Kahn, who made the movie about Rosie the Riveter. She was not the director but she did all the research work on that movie. We were very good friends. She and Candace Falk undertook to educate me on the subject of women. So did Ellen Rifkin. All three of them were very close friends. I didn't see the women's movement as the absolute center of all things because I had never, ever had to fight for the right to get the floor. These people were complaining that they couldn't get the floor in a meeting. Well, I thought that was nuts. If you want the floor, you take the floor. Nobody had ever tried to sit on me. But it was true that the New Left was very different from the Communist movement. I mean, the New Left really was bad about women. I wasn't used to that. I'd never had to put up with it. I had an argument with my son, who was part of the New Left. I said to him, "This thing about fighting about who gets the floor. That is just stupid. If you want the floor, you take the floor." He said, "Oh Mom, you don't understand anything!" (laughter)

**Hughes:** (laughter)

**Frantz:** So it took a while to educate me on the subject of women's issues. I was certainly always in favor of women's equality, but I had never had experienced that kind of personal discrimination in organizational work. But I did have a lot of organizational skills. I'd been doing this stuff for thirty-five years by this time. Reading Adrienne Rich's book *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* really educated me.

**Hughes:** As far as the Women's Center is concerned, I did read when I was on the board that there was an emphasis on, and a sensitivity to having a bridge to the community. It was an ongoing focus, and they felt it had value. They wanted to reach a variety of women besides exclusively the college-aged women at UCSC. Is that true, or is that just my sense of it?

**Frantz:** You're right. We tried to get a lot of women in from the community. You always want to reach out. That's one of the things about organizing. You reach out in as many directions as you can. This was the same time that Ciel [Benedetto] was really getting the Women's Health Center underway, and then the Santa Cruz Women's Commission had started this business of honoring ten women a year, and I got involved in that. But I don't remember details very well, and really, this business about reaching out and organizing just comes naturally to me. (laughter) I sort of take it for granted.

But there were issues. Here's an interesting issue about the history of women at UC Santa Cruz. Because of the particular and special function of the colleges as social institutions for each group who was at that college, there was a lot of socializing going on at the provosts' houses. And it was absolutely assumed and taken for granted that it had to be a male provost and he had to have a wife who was good at organizing social

events. I mean, that was just part of the protocol. And somebody got a divorce, I forget who and which, but he had to leave the provostship because he had to have a wife there to take care of managing the provost's house.

**Hughes:** For free.

**Frantz:** Absolutely!

I remember a party at Cowell College. I don't remember the occasion. Among other people there was [Founding Chancellor] Dean McHenry. I didn't know Dean McHenry. I mean, I recognized him. But he didn't know me from a hole in the wall. I'd never had any contact with him. I needed to make conversation and I said, "Isn't it wonderful about the new Women's Center?" That was not the right thing to say! It turned out that he didn't think it was wonderful at all! Because he wanted the building [Cardiff House] for something else. It was a question of fighting about the building, who got the building. Furthermore, he wasn't at all sure that we needed any such thing. And also, maybe it was discrimination to have one for women and not for men. In general, I really punched a button. (laughter) I was trying to make innocent conversation (laughter) but it didn't matter because Dean McHenry didn't mean anything to me, and I didn't mean anything to him. I thought it was really amusing. He had other dreams for the use of that building and if he had gotten into it at an earlier moment he would have stopped it.

I just was naturally a liaison between women's studies and American studies, where I was teaching. That was a group of people all of whom were very aware of women's

issues, so women's issues were a natural part of the American studies program. I was on the women's studies executive board most of those years.

**Hughes:** You were able to work with some wonderful people.

**Frantz:** Yes, I couldn't have asked for a better bunch of people to work with. I learned a huge amount. I was learning as I went. One of the big things we did that was somewhat connected with the Women's Center, but not directly, was Helene's campaign to educate Chancellor Sinsheimer about sexual harassment. We had a meeting about sexual harassment, and he came late and stood in the back. You could read his face. He was just astonished to hear these stories of sexual harassment. He really didn't know what was going on. You could see his mouth drop. It was really interesting. There was so much passion in the room about it, you know!

I had another connection with the Women's Center. It was not a direct connection, but we met at the Women's Center. It was around Proposition 209.<sup>1</sup> We set up a committee. The point was that women in this state who had to vote 209 up or down didn't realize that they were protected by [affirmative action]. They only thought it protected black people or Latinos. Women are just as much the recipients of affirmative action legally as anybody else. It has really made a big difference in a lot of people's lives in some occupational categories that we are protected under affirmative action. But most women didn't know that. So the idea was to organize a women's group that would try to make

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<sup>1</sup>Proposition 209, the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI) that won a majority vote in 1996 referendum, banned the use of race and gender preferences in state university admissions, employment, and contracting.



that visible and audible. I started this and we got the League of Women Voters, among others, and a much broader bunch of women than usually get involved in these things.

We had a very impressive committee and we put on a terrific evening at the First Congregational Church. We filled the church. We got Sista Monica, the blues singer, to come. And one of our members, who has since gone to law school, a wonderful person, she wanted to get Sista Monica and she just kept calling her up. She didn't know her from Adam. But she's in the phone book. So she called her up and left messages, and called her up and left messages, and called her up and left messages. And one day she returned the call and agreed to come. There's nothing like persistence. It turned out to be a very good meeting. Bettina [Aptheker] and various other people spoke. That directly grew out of the Women's Center.

We really worked. We raised enough money to have a full-page ad in the paper about women and 209. It wasn't a Women's Center project, exactly, but we met at the Women's Center and got a lot of people involved to know the Women's Center for the first time.

**Hughes:** Well, isn't having a place for women to be and to make things happen an important part of the purpose of the Women's Center?

**Frantz:** Right.

**Hughes:** I just can't imagine how many meetings and how many planning sessions have taken place in that space.

**Frantz:** The [Celebrating Women] event at the Civic Auditorium was really a big coming out party for the Women's Center. Beatriz organized that. She was really a live wire. She could move a lot of people. She was lively and spirited and full of energy. And Arlyn [Osborne] was wonderful. Kathie Olsen was wonderful. We had some really good talent, and did a lot of very interesting things, and got a lot of students involved. We had a lot of speakers that came in. I think [the Women's Center is] great. I think it's great that it's there. But I feel it hasn't, for a long time, lived up to its potential.

Beatriz was a very effective director. She was so full of life. She had a lot of ideas and she kept the place buzzing. She was a buzzer. And I was very fond of Shane [Snowdon], personally. She's brilliant. She's extremely well-organized. I thought she was extremely smart and she did a lot of good work at the Women's Center.

I confess that I have never had a clear vision of what the Women's Center ought to be. I mean, I've never thought about it that way, and I don't have the impression that most of the people who've been working with it have thought about it in that larger sense. We certainly never meant it to be a research institution supporting scholarship by faculty. That is available all over the campus in departments. It didn't seem to me that we needed that. If a woman faculty member had a research project that she wanted to do, in history or psychology, or whatever, she would be able to get support in that institution. I don't think it was ever thought of that way. It was thought of much more as a student service unit. I thought of it more as a place where students and faculty could come together and talk about specific issues as they came up, and figure out some way to work as a unit to come together as women to influence the direction of the campus.

One of the most successful events over the years, at the center, I think, has been the graduation ceremonies. We always have a women's studies graduation and people get up and talk briefly about their senior theses. [The events couldn't be] more warm and spirited.

**Hughes:** What's the most gratifying aspect of being involved with the Women's Center?

**Frantz:** I met a lot of friends there. I have enormously enjoyed working with Helene [Moglen].

**Hughes:** Well, you two have quite a legacy.

## Kathie Olsen



*Katherine (Kathie) Olsen served as the first assistant director of the Women's Center, beginning in the fall of 1985. She is the daughter of the well-known feminist writer, Tillie Olsen. Her father, Jack Olsen, was a labor organizer and a linotype operator. Kathie brought this working-class perspective to the Women's Center, as well as her strong feminism.*

*Kathie loved her job but eventually needed to find a better place to raise teenagers. In January of 1987 she and her husband moved to Ashland, Oregon, and Kathie left the position in the hands of Arlyn Osborne. Since then Kathie has had a long career with non-profits, including several positions with the Oregon Ashland Shakespeare Festival. She is currently a contract program officer and does consulting for nonprofit boards on strategic planning, fundraising, and board development. She "considers her primary work to be that of fostering collaborations and creative*

*solutions for the sake of world peace, human rights, environmental health, and joy.” She and her husband, Charley Hoge, are both artists with a small farm in southern Oregon, and have three grown children.*

*It was challenging to track Kathie down, but I finally reached her through word-of-mouth, and conducted an interview by telephone at her farm on March 21, 2005. My only regret at the time was that we could not sit together and enjoy a cup of tea over the interview, but that wish was granted several months later when Kathie visited Santa Cruz and we met at Gayle’s Bakery in Capitola to go over the transcript.*

—Irene Reti

## Early Life

**Reti:** Let’s start by you telling me about your background, such as where you were born and your early involvement in feminism. What influences did you bring to your work at the Women’s Center?

**Olsen:** I was born and raised in San Francisco, the child of Tillie Olsen, who was a writer, although she was not when I was growing up. She was, but that wasn’t her primary identification. My father, Jack Olsen, was a labor organizer and a linotype operator, which is a type of printing trade. [I was] the third of their four daughters. Working class. Mama worked as a secretary almost all the time I was growing up, did her writing late at night. I went to elementary school, middle school and junior high in the Mission District of San Francisco, so I grew up with my same group of friends.

When I graduated from high school I went to work in an insurance company. That was the beginning of my life in the clerical world, which was my life for a long time. I graduated high school in 1961. The Vietnam War was raging, although at that point we weren’t . . . we didn’t really get it yet. We learned later. It was also the early days of the

civil rights movement. My parents, who were both old Lefties, had raised us to have a very fierce sense of justice and we paid a lot of attention to what was going on in the civil rights movement. It was only a few years after I graduated from high school that I got involved in it, but I got involved in it in my own home town, feeling that I didn't have any right to go to anybody else's home town to tell them what to do. Got involved in the civil rights movement and in the anti-war movement.

A lot of my friends from high school had joined the service right after . . . that's what you did when you graduated from Mission High School if you were a boy. You went into the service. So I was losing a lot of friends, and having them come home in various states of disrepair and decrepitude, and fiercely wanted that war to be over to save my pals. I saw what it was doing. I saw the carnage, saw it up very close and personal. One of the most gentle, wonderful boys that I grew up with married his high school sweetheart, who was a good pal of mine, and came home from the war thinking that they would live happily ever after, but he was so screwed up that he was pretty violent and pretty messed up, and ended up ultimately killing her and killing himself. There are all these terrible stories that came out of that war. That was one of them. Another was that one of the girls I'd been a pom-pom girl with married her high school sweetheart, who came home, and they got pregnant and he re-upped and went back, and he was killed in Vietnam and then a year later she and their baby were in a terrible automobile accident and they both died. It was just horrible. It was one after another in a row of terrible things all tied to that war. So I was against that war. Even before I understood what it meant to the Vietnamese people I was against that war, because of what it was doing to us. Sort of like people are beginning to do right now about Iraq. They are beginning to get it.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Olsen:** You can't ask people to go off thinking they are going off to do good, and then ask them to do the unthinkable and have it not affect them deeply. It does. Anyway, I was also involved in the civil rights movement. I got arrested and ended up sitting two months in jail as a result of that.

**Reti:** Whoa!

**Olsen:** Yeah. People tell you that the civil rights movement was a Southern phenomenon. I hate to tell you, they were just as hard on people in the North, who never really talk about it.

**Reti:** This was in San Francisco?

**Olsen:** Yeah, this was in San Francisco. I have a broken vein on the back of my leg gotten from the baton of an Oakland police officer to prove it. Anyway, meanwhile I'm working as a secretary. And then in 1970, I moved to Redding, California. I'd always known that I was a country girl in my heart, even though I was born and raised in the city. I moved to Redding, California with some friends, and worked in the War on Poverty program for a couple of years, became a secretary in the legal aid program, and then a paralegal. And met my husband and had my first baby. Then when she was a year old, we realized that our animals had better health care than our baby did, and thought, you know, maybe Redding isn't the place to raise a child. So my sister, Julie [Olsen Edwards], the one just older than me, she and her husband Rob lived in Santa Cruz. They both teach at Cabrillo [College].

**Reti:** Oh, Rob Edwards, the archaeologist?

**Olsen:** Yes. And they said, "Come here. Come here!" So we did. When I first got there I worked for legal aid, and then . . . I really burned out on it. I really burned out on making the least amount of money and training all of these fresh-out-of-law-school lawyers who started out making twice what I made, and after I'd trained them then they made three times what I made. Really was kind of horrified.

Oh, there's another piece that's missing in all of this, sorry, which is germane. Which is that even before I was in Redding, I had already been bitten with the women's movement. I mean, my mother was a feminist. But during my twenties I had always thought of it as kind of a student thing, and I was kind of an anti-intellectual.

**Reti:** That's interesting.

**Olsen:** I tried going to a women's group meeting when I was still in the Bay Area, but found that issues of class really got in my way. I felt that these were a bunch of "spoiled baby women" and they were whining, and I didn't understand it. It was awful. (laughter) But when I moved to Redding, I moved up there with a couple who were friends of mine, and the female part of the couple, she had been active in the women's movement. She said, "Kathie, we've got to help these country women get their shit together." So I said, "Okay. That will be fun." And we called for a meeting of women who were interested in talking about women's liberation. This was in 1971.

**Reti:** Those were the early days of the second wave of feminism.



**Olsen:** Yes. We didn't know what would happen. But to our absolute astonishment, about forty-five women showed up.

**Reti:** Whoa!

**Olsen:** Yeah, in Redding, California. And they were a varied group of women, some of them college-educated but the vast majority of them had never been to college. Some of them were what I call redneck women. (I feel like it's okay, I can call them that because I'm kindred in a way.) Redneck women who were just pissed off. They were just tired of it. And a couple of Native American women who were there because the Native American rights movement was in full flower at that point, and they had felt pretty marginalized. And a couple of black women who had lived in Redding their whole life and were tired of dealing with both the race issue and the gender issue, and had never really thought of it as a gender issue, but they thought it would be kind of fun because it would piss off their fathers and their brothers and their boyfriends and their husbands if they came.

We had this meeting and we went around the room, everybody saying why they were there. We were all of us astonished to see each other, and decided that we wanted to keep meeting. We called ourselves The Carrie Nation, which was a play on words . . . everybody was . . . the "Native American Nation" and the "Black Nation" and this and that "nation." So we decided we'd be The Carrie Nation.<sup>1</sup> Word of it got out in town, and there was an editorial in the local newspaper saying, "The libbers have come." We got invited to speak at every one of the fraternal organizations in town, and they thought it was going to be a joke. We got pretty serious, pretty fast.

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<sup>1</sup>Named for Carrie Nation, the famous feminist and temperance movement leader.

We ended up teaching a class at the local community college. There was no such thing, obviously, as women's studies in those days. But we taught a class called *Women in Society*, or something like that. And because none of us knew exactly how to do it, we each took a piece of something that we were interested in doing, and said, well, we'll give a lecture on that. One of our members was college-educated, and she was listed as the official teacher, but we each gave lectures. I did one on children's literature and fairy tales; researching it blew my mind. We had never read stuff with that lens before, and when we started going back and reading all of the stuff that we'd grown up with, it was pretty horrifying.

**Reti:** My mother was a member of NOW and participated in consciousness-raising groups in the early 1970s. I was reading the early *Ms.* And I remember when those first interpretations of what was really going on in those fairy tales came out.

**Olsen:** We were just amazed! We had never thought about what kinds of messages we were getting, and therefore what kind of messages we were teaching our daughters. You know, "Jack Sprat could eat no fat. His wife could eat no lean." I mean, think about some of the stuff in there. Think about, what is it? "Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater, had a wife and couldn't keep her. Put her in a pumpkin shell and there he kept her very well." Oh my God! Excuse me! This man is abusing this woman. He's locking her up! We didn't even think about it. Anyway, we went through all that. And Carrie Nation actually . . . there is still a remnant of it left in Redding. We were invited back about ten years ago to a twenty-year reunion, as the founding mothers, and had a great, wonderful time together.

**Reti:** That's extraordinary.

**Olsen:** And we looked at issues of economics from a feminist point of view. I'd always been raised to look at them from a Marxist point of view: you have more in common with your working-class brothers than you do with an upper-class woman.

**Reti:** You said your mom [Tillie Olsen] was a feminist. Had she always been a feminist, or was that a recent development?

**Olsen:** Oh, no. She had always been. She was an early day Margaret Sanger type. And my dad. My dad, bless his heart, for a man born in the shtetl in Russia, he not only married this feminist, but he was a strong supporter and a pretty unusual man.

And then I had my first child, as I told you. But Redding was not a good place to raise kids, we didn't think. So we moved to Santa Cruz, and I left behind The Carrie Nation. It was a sad farewell. We'd been meeting together at that point for many years, and gone through births and deaths and divorces and all kinds of things together. Moved to Santa Cruz and really burned out on working in the legal profession, around the legal profession. I was tired of being typecast, and tired of not making any money, and being treated as: "Gee you're wonderful. You're brilliant. We couldn't do without you. But no, we're not going to pay you a living wage!"

### **Becoming a Student**

So somebody said, "You should go to college." At this point I was thirty-two, thirty-three years old. I said, "There's no way. I barely got out of high school. My grades were terrible. Nobody's going to take me." And they said, "Well, go to Cabrillo [College]." So I took three classes at Cabrillo, and absolutely thought I'd died and gone to heaven. I mean, I was being given student financial aid to go to school and read books. I'd always

been a reader. It just never occurred to me you could do something like that. So I went, and it was wonderful and I loved it. But we couldn't afford for me to keep doing it. And somebody said, "Well, if you could only get into UCSC. They have more money to give you financially, and they even have student housing." At this point I'm pregnant with my second child.

**Reti:** So this is about when?

**Olsen:** 1976, 1977. I knew I couldn't get in normally. I didn't qualify. A friend of mine said, "Write a letter to Herman Blake (who was then the provost at Oakes) and tell him the story of your life, tell him what's happening with you. Throw yourself on his mercy. You're right. There's no way you're going to qualify [otherwise]." I went to take the SAT. I had this great big pregnant stomach. I'm in my thirties, with all these nineteen-year-old kids. I hadn't done mathematics in—I don't know how long. I got something like a 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on the English and something like the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile on the math. It was ridiculous. So I wrote him this letter, and told him the story of my life, and told him how much fun I was having in school, and told him how much I loved it, and how come I couldn't sustain it unless I had more help, and that there was no way I was going to get more help at Cabrillo because they didn't have it to offer. But I knew UCSC did, and could he help me? Well, I didn't hear anything until two months later I get this phone call from somebody at Oakes saying, "Fill out your paperwork and get it up here! Where's your paperwork?"

**Reti:** Oh my gosh.

**Olsen:** So I applied, and they let me in. Those days you were able to have enough financial aid to sort of live, and they were able to get me into student housing right away, which was another miracle. And so Charley [Hoge] and the girls and I—we were even allowed to bring our dog in those days—and our dog, Hank, we all moved up to student housing on Koshland Way at UCSC. I was halfway through my freshman year. That was it! I just loved it. I ended up majoring in anthropology with an interest in medical anthropology and graduated four years later with honors.

And what do you do with *that* degree? While I was there, one of my teachers was Marge Frantz. I had lots of wonderful, wonderful professors. But Marge took a real interest in me, partly because of my mother. I think she was a fan of my mother's work. But also, she and I just became good friends. I ended up being a TA for her for a while. But when I graduated, you know, what do you do with that degree? There was no way I could go on to graduate school. We didn't have the money, and I didn't really even understand how you were supposed to do that. I didn't know the game well enough. Diane Lewis was my advisor and she was a wonderful person, but Diane was going through a lot of stuff of her own at that time and really was not in a position to mentor me. I don't hold that against her at all. She was having her own stuff going on then. I didn't know what to do. So I went back to work as a legal secretary.

**Reti:** And you had graduated in . . .

### **Coming to Work at the UCSC Women's Center**

**Olsen:** 1982. And hated it. There was no way I could go back. There was no way that I could go back to being a legal secretary. So I took some time off, and I was trying to

figure out what to do. I got pregnant. I had a miscarriage. Was doing some writing. Helping my mother. She was finishing up a book, and I was working a little bit for her. I was at sea. And I got a call one day. I don't remember whether it was from Marge or from Helene [Moglen], but from one of them, saying, "You're not going to believe it, but the university gave us Cardiff House for a women's center." They were beside themselves with surprise and joy. They had hired a director, and they were going to be hiring an assistant, and was I interested in applying? I said, "You bet! In a heartbeat." I zoomed up there and filled out the paperwork and met Diane [Reeves], and she hired me.

### **The Early Days of the Women's Center**

At that point we didn't even have the keys to Cardiff House. But we got the keys to Cardiff House, which was empty. And at that time . . . I don't know how long you've been at the university, Irene, but at that time there was almost nothing around Cardiff House.

**Reti:** I came to school here in 1978.

**Olsen:** So you know. I mean, there were lemon groves around. It was really a beautiful, bucolic space. And before the earthquake, of course, we had the working fireplace and all that. We really saw the house as in itself an extraordinary asset, something that could be used as a way to make people from town feel comfortable, people from the county feel comfortable there. I had images of being able to raise money (and we actually did a little bit of this), by having people use it for weddings and anniversaries and parties and pay rent for it. Community groups could use it for free meetings and for their fundraisers and things like that. We had a very little budget. We bought most of the

furnishings used because the university didn't have any for us, really. But we wanted it to look beautiful, and we wanted it to look like a home for the women of UCSC and for the women of Santa Cruz. So we did. We went zooming around and furnished it more like a home than like an office.

A lot of Diane's work was with the Student Services staff and with the hierarchy in the university. I knew the ins and outs of the clerical part because I put myself partly through college by working on campus. So I knew how to process an invoice and how to do all that stuff. And I knew . . . in those days we were using really old-fashioned computers. I knew NROFF and I knew NEQN and I knew TBL. My job was the clerical piece, and my job was also outreach to the community, and to the women who worked at UCSC, because we saw that house as a place to celebrate the women of UCSC, as well as the women of the whole county, and to students—because I was such a recent alum.

**Reti:** You're talking about staff and faculty?

**Olsen:** Yes, I was talking about staff, as much as faculty. Absolutely.

**Reti:** How would you do that kind of outreach?

**Olsen:** Well, as a matter of fact, we did great with it the first years I was there. One of the things we did was at Christmas time we had a big show of works by women of the *staff* of UCSC, no faculty allowed. We put out a call saying, "If you have something that you do, whether it's knitting hats, or painting, or whatever, this is your chance to be professionally shown. We're going to mount a professional exhibit." And we did. We did it at Cardiff House. And issued formal invitations, and gave each artist who showed her

stuff carte blanche to invite her family and whoever else to come. We had wine and cheese and made it fancy. And mounted the stuff beautifully and put up good signage and made it a real exhibit.

**Reti:** That's beautiful.

**Olsen:** And people loved it! All day, and all into the night, that house was jammed. People were out all over the porches, all over the yard. People were thrilled—and surprised. The faculty members who came and the administrators who came were totally blown away to see this other side of the people they'd been working with. They didn't know that these women were doing all these things. Women who were poets, we put their poetry up on the wall.

There were all kinds of things we did. We had a masseuse come for three days in a row. Any woman on staff could call and make an appointment to come and have a massage.

**Reti:** Wonderful.

**Olsen:** What else did we do? We did all kinds of things like that. We had teas; we had celebrations. We made it so that women could have their birthdays celebrated there with their co-workers. You know, whatever came to us, we did. There is actually, or there used to be, I don't know if it's still there, we kept a scrapbook of flyers of everything that we did. We had events there, oh, at least three or four a week. We kept all the flyers and a lot of photos in scrapbooks. So we wanted that kind of outreach for sure. And when I say "we," I mean the board. A lot of this came from the board. This was their dream, to make a place where women could go and be celebrated and be comfortable. The Re-entry



Center was in existence already, and we were good partners with them, but they were there to serve re-entry students. That was their job. It's a hard job, and it was a big job. We had to fill in all the rest of the gaps, which were huge. We did outreach to other women's groups in the county. There was everything from groups of midwives, to Republican women to—you name it. There were women farmworkers in Watsonville who were organizing and ended up ultimately going on strike.

**Reti:** So was the Women's Center connected with the cannery strike, during your period?

**Olsen:** We were not connected with that cannery strike. I went down and visited, and I went to a couple of demonstrations, and got to know some of the women there, but they were not interested in coming up to UC Santa Cruz. I mean, there was no way they were going to use the Women's Center. I didn't really know how I could help them, except to go and make sure people here knew about it.

The people at Student Services were wonderful. It was not a bad home for us. It was an unusual home for us in that the women's centers that had been established at other UC campuses were pretty much academic centers, as much as anything else . . .

**Reti:** In the sense of doing research, of being research units?

**Olsen:** Well, yeah. They were seen as a place to help showcase women's research, or help support women's research in presentations. Every women's center was finding its way.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Olsen:** None of us knew what we were doing. Diane Reeves had come from a successful women's center at UC Riverside. She did some very good things, I thought. Anyway, Student Services was very supportive of us. Bruce Moore, who was the head of Student Services then, was great, and Lee Duffus. Both Bruce and Lee were very supportive. Whatever we said we wanted to try, they said, "Go for it!" We never, ever were pressured to not do anything by them. They were wonderful. I feel tremendous affection and gratitude to them, because there were plenty of people who didn't get it, particularly as the marginalized women began to realize that this was a space for them. At that point lesbians were fighting a terrible uphill battle. So a lot of the lesbian students slowly but surely started finding their way down to Cardiff House, partly because a lot of them were having trouble with their mothers. You know, they were at that age anyway when you're having trouble with your mother . . .

**Reti:** (laughter)

**Olsen:** And when you're also coming out . . .

**Reti:** Right.

**Olsen:** You know, it's pretty painful. And they came, and here were these mothers there. I mean, I'm a mother, and Diane was a mother, and our board members were mothers, a lot of them. And to have older women there with open arms and understanding hearts was really important to them.

**Reti:** That's interesting.

**Olsen:** They started coming. And then a group of people involved in S & M [sadoomasochism] came and said they wanted to meet there, and I went, "Oh, gee, this is getting hard for me! I don't know. I'm not into anything that hurts anybody!" And they had to teach me stuff so that I wouldn't be so freaked out. But you know, it wasn't up to me to censure. So they started having meetings there. Meanwhile we're having some people who are having weddings there and people were having receptions and these birthday parties . . . It was a very eclectic group of people who were in and out of that house, and using that house. We tried very hard to keep fresh flowers in there, and keep it from looking institutional. We tried to keep it looking like a kind of lovely home.

**Reti:** Were there tensions between, let's say, the lesbians and other groups, or...

**Olsen:** No, because people used it in the way that a community center is used. People would book space for meetings, and we would make sure that there was coffee and water, that there was toilet paper, and it was clean and fresh and ready for them. They would come and have their meeting, and then they would go, and somebody else would come and have a meeting and they would go. No, there weren't. Within the board itself, there was tremendous excitement about this new thing that they were creating. There was a great feeling of wanting to be inclusive of all women. I don't think anybody at that point was feeling that they weren't welcome there.

## **Diversity and Inclusivity**

**Reti:** Were there efforts to work on racial diversity in terms of serving different communities?

**Olsen:** There were. At that point, you should know, that at UCSC, with the exception of Oakes [College], there wasn't much, I don't think, in terms of racial diversity on that campus. Certainly not on the staff. Somewhat on the faculty, but the women of color who were on the faculty were mostly involved somewhat on the board, or around the Women's Center. They didn't feel marginalized from there at all. They felt supported there. But the outreach to the students . . . No, there wasn't much. It was part of the reason that Beatriz [Lopez-Flores] got hired when Diane left, was to try to bridge that. Now, I consciously made sure that we had student workers who represented everybody, racially and also in terms of sexual preference, and in terms of age. Because I thought that the student workers really . . . I mean, if a student comes in they need to see other students who are like them. We had wonderful student workers. We all worked very hard. They gave lots of hours and they were wonderful. They came through one hundred percent for us time, after time, after time.

The fact is, though, that Diane was a white woman, and I was a white woman. And Helene [Moglen], the president of the board, was a white woman, and Mardi Wormhoudt, who was also at one point the president of the board—she was a white woman. The board was acutely aware, as was the staff, of the fact that that was not going to work. And so the hiring of Beatriz was conscious, and I think the right decision. She had many, many talents, that woman, but the fact that her name was Beatriz Lopez-Flores helped a lot. She could have gotten the job on her talents alone, but I think that the combination was just dynamite.

**Reti:** My memory of UC Santa Cruz in the mid-1980s is that it was pretty middle-class. It continues to be rather affluent, but at least has more diversity. You were a working-class woman who had come back to school, and then came to work at the university.

**Olsen:** Well, it was great! I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. First off, you should know that I was a student at Oakes. Oakes was really the right place for me. I was very lucky to be at Oakes. I was also a mother of little tiny children going to school full time and working part time. So I didn't have a lot of time to hang out when I was a student. Actually I didn't have *any* time to hang out when I was a student. I went to the Whole Earth [Restaurant] to study. I never went there to just have coffee with a friend. I didn't have time. My life was pretty schizophrenic. I was either studying real hard and in class, or I was at home with my kids. There was not much in between. There were things that were a mystery to me, that I never did figure out, that nobody ever explained to me.<sup>2</sup> People sort of had secrets. They didn't know they were secrets, but they knew things I didn't know. I didn't even know I didn't know them until after something would happen and I would be sort of stunned, say, "I didn't know it worked that way," or "I didn't know that was possible." I think the university, certainly in those days (I don't know if it's any better now), did not do a very good job at helping people like me who didn't know the ways of a university, to really know them. They tried at Oakes. I think the students who lived at Oakes may have had an easier time than I did, but I lived at [Married] Student Housing. But I don't know that. But I still always felt like I had been given the keys to the castle in this way. I had been allowed to do this marvelous stuff. I

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<sup>2</sup>These mysteries included how to get into graduate school, which symposia were important to attend, which periodicals should I be reading, who was interested in my field, when a visiting scholar was on campus.—Kathie Olsen

was allowed to study, and argue ideas, and write papers, and go to the library. And they'd give me this check every quarter. It was a miracle to me! (laughter) How could this be?

Then when I came back to work at the university after graduating, I was thrilled. I was so excited about the house itself. It was such a beautiful home in those days, and to be able to work in it, and help decorate and design it and tend to it . . . I planted flowers in the big, old fountain that was there with Dorothy Healy, a wonderful woman on staff who was on the plant crew. She and I planted flowers there, and made it beautiful. It was wonderful. It was a treat to do all those things. I never felt anything but included by members of the board. I never felt anything but celebrated by them. I never felt marginalized by them at all. As I told you, Bruce and Lee both were wonderful and inclusive with me also. I never felt marginalized in any way.

### **The Women's Center Board**

**Reti:** That's wonderful. Let's talk about the board. Were there particular people on the Women's Center board that you remember?

**Olsen:** Oh, yeah. Well, I've already mentioned Helene [Moglen] and Marge [Frantz]. Marge worked so hard. Oh, my God, she worked so hard to make that thing real. And Carol Whitehill, who worked as a staff psychologist for a while at UCSC.

What I loved about that board was their positive enthusiasm, their courage in standing up to their colleagues and saying, "Yes, this is important! No, this isn't a sideline." Which took courage in those days.

**Reti:** Oh, it must have taken incredible courage.

**Olsen:** Yes, it's hard enough to be a woman in academia. To stand up in that way and say, "We're going to use the university's resources for this, and we're going to make sure it happens and that it happens right," was pretty amazing. They were wonderful. They were supportive. We came to them and said, "This group wants to use the center." [Or] "We want to do this or that or the other thing." They [never] said no. They were saying, "Go for it. Go for it. Go. Go. Go." And that was wonderful.

**Reti:** I have a list here of the early board members. Let me just run down the list. Marge Frantz you mentioned. Gini Matute-Bianchi?

**Olsen:** Oh, yes. Gini was wonderful! Gini is one of those positive [people]. Did you ever meet Gini?

**Reti:** I've seen her speak, but I don't know her personally, no.

**Olsen:** Oh, she's marvelous. Gini was loving, funny, charming, very brave . . . She kept fooling people because she looked so elegant and middle class in her own way, but she was so fierce and so wonderful. She was great with me. She was just wonderful with me. She never treated me like anything other than a colleague.

**Reti:** That's great, because being in an assistant position it could happen even in a women's organization that you end up feeling marginalized.

**Olsen:** Yep. Well, that didn't happen to me there, except from Diane [Reeves] and that was because of her own situation, really.

**Reti:** Okay, so Wendy Mink?

**Olsen:** Yes! Wendy was another one of those totally brave women. In her field there were men who did not understand what she was doing, and why she was doing it, and she just kept on doing it. She's brave and strong and calm.

**Reti:** I've heard great things about her all the way through this oral history project. Everybody has been mentioning her. Let's see . . . Adrienne Zihlman.

**Olsen:** Adrienne is one of my great heroes of all time because of her work as a physical anthropologist. The thing about Adrienne is that she really loved her work as an academic. She was doing breakthrough stuff and she knew it and she loved it. She had not yet done the coloring book that helped make her famous.<sup>3</sup> Her job was to keep us all remembering that this was also an academic discipline. I mean, in those times every single field was being affected by the debate about gender. Every single field was being rattled. Even the library was being rattled. Everybody was being rattled by it, and finding their way, and breaking new ground. Adrienne was right at the forefront of that in the field of physical anthropology. That was her passion and that's what she brought to us, was, "Ooh! Guess what we just figured out!" She was marvelous, and her academic rigor and her fascination with women and issues of gender were genuine. She was always inspirational. I loved Adrienne Zihlman.

**Reti:** That's great. Now, that was a transitional time for the women's studies program. It was before they became a board.

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<sup>3</sup>Adrienne Zihlman, *The Human Evolution Coloring Book* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1982).



**Olsen:** Yes, people were engaging in women's studies, absolutely. A lot of the women who were on the board were engaged in it in their own field. They were coming at it—whether it was American studies or anthropology or psychology, or literature, or physiology, or whatever. Some of them may have even been teaching women's studies courses. I don't really remember that. I don't know that.

**Reti:** But were the women's studies students coming to the Women's Center and drawing on it as a resource?

**Olsen:** Drawing on it as a resource? I don't know if I want to say it that way. Somewhat as a resource, in that it was a place to come and feel safe to talk about whatever they wanted to talk about. It was a place . . . If they were having trouble with a professor because of their interest in gender issues, they would more likely go to other women's studies people for it, but they would certainly also feel comfortable coming to the Women's Center to talk about it, and they might. Sometimes meetings took place at the Women's Center because people felt safer there than at other places on campus. But I don't know if I'd call it a resource . . . I think that might be overstating the case.

**Reti:** Okay. Fair enough. Let's see, continuing down this list here. Corinne Miller.

**Olsen:** Yes, Corinne Miller, if I remember right, was running the Women's Re-Entry Program.

**Reti:** That's right.

**Olsen:** Yes. This very gentle woman who was always having to fight for her budget every year. If she felt threatened by us, she never showed it, which was wonderful, to

have a collaborative spirit like that, instead of somebody who said, "Oh no, somebody else fighting for money that I might be able to get." That didn't happen. It was because of her integrity. She was a pretty wonderful person.

**Reti:** And then Gillian Greensite.

**Olsen:** I barely remember Gillian. I can see her face but I can't tell you anything about her.

**Reti:** That's fine. Okay, then there are several people from the community. Shirley Castillo.

**Olsen:** Yes, Shirley Castillo. Shirley was involved, committed, active. She was a great board member.

**Reti:** And then you mentioned earlier Mardi Wormhoudt.

**Olsen:** Yes, Mardi was the mayor at the time, so her time was pretty minimal. But she came to board meetings like a good faithful board member. She really wanted that Women's Center to happen, and was thrilled that there was such a strong attempt to make it be a community-campus thing, to make a bridge between the campus and the community. She really wanted that to happen and she was so pleased that it was coming from the women. Considering the pressures that she was under, she gave a tremendous amount of her time towards making it happen.

**Reti:** It's incredible to have the mayor on the board.

**Olsen:** Oh, yeah. She's an amazing woman. She's one of those people who figures out what has to be done and makes it happen.

**Reti:** I know.

**Olsen:** I have tremendous love for her. I have a wonderful letter that she and Helene wrote when I left, for me to bring with me when I moved up here [to Ashland, Oregon], to help me find work here. It's this beautiful, wonderful letter. I'll always be grateful to them for it. I still have it.

### **Relationships with Faculty and Staff**

**Reti:** That's great. And other than the board, were there other key faculty that you remember being involved in the center?

**Olsen:** I think it would be fair to say that most of the women, particularly the women in the social sciences who taught on campus, were supportive of the Women's Center. I think that there were also lots of staff women who were supportive of the Women's Center, who had this moment of hope that it was going to be a great resource for them also. Who helped in lots of ways. Helping us figure out our way around, and helping us find resources on campus that we might not have been able to find otherwise, like that wonderful woman, Dorothy Healy, who worked for plant services, who worked so hard. Making a beautiful garden is a lot of work! And she did it in her extra time. It wasn't like they gave her time to do it. She did it.

**Reti:** How dedicated.

**Olsen:** She was really wonderful. She worked so hard to keep that place looking beautiful. Because part of what we wanted to do, is they thought, "Oh, we're giving them Cardiff House. They're going to trash it. They're going to treat it . . ." I don't know what they thought we were going to do, have orgies or something down there. (laughter) We really wanted to show them that that wasn't the case, that we were . . . That wasn't the case. That wasn't how we were going to do business. And that is not the way we did business, either.

### **Cardiff House as a Location for the Women's Center**

**Reti:** Did you see any drawbacks to having Cardiff House as your location?

**Olsen:** (sigh) No. Not until the construction started all around us. No. Having a place that [provided] respite and was so physically beautiful was wonderful. Having it sitting on the edge of campus like that was symbolic for how we wanted it to be reaching out to the broader community of women. Letting it have its own driveway, when they let us use the driveway . . . They made us stop that pretty quick. But when they let us use the driveway, that was also another advantage for off-campus groups to come on campus.

**Reti:** Oh, so they did let you use it at the very beginning.

**Olsen:** Yep. But they got over that real fast. (laughter) Real fast they got over that one. Somebody somewhere said, "No. What? Are you crazy? You can't have a separate way to get on campus." Which was unfortunate, because it did help to create a sense of welcome to not have to go through a gate. Gee, I haven't thought about this in so long.

**Reti:** One of the things that's come up is that some community members had difficulty finding the center. Of course having that driveway in use would have made it easier.

**Olsen:** Yep. That's right. You betcha. It just would have made it more welcoming. If you could put a sign down there on High Street saying, come on up, it makes it easier if you are coming to an event. And particularly when all the construction started around there, it just was a nightmare to come in. But until then, I thought it was perfect. And we loved having that fireplace, which we were allowed to use. It made a very welcoming thing. The kitchen was a huge asset. I used to roast a turkey once a week, a big twenty-five pound turkey, and we'd invite women staff members to come down for a free lunch.

**Reti:** Oh, how wonderful.

**Olsen:** Yeah, I mean, there were all kinds of things that we did using that house, because it was a house, as opposed to an institutional spot.

### **Funding Issues and Providing Programming for UCSC Staff Women**

**Reti:** Yes. And did you have conflicts over using university funding that was coming primarily from students for staff activities?

**Olsen:** (pause) No. Why?

**Reti:** Okay.

**Olsen:** I don't know why there would be an issue. It's not like we were wasting people's money. And everything that we did was open to all the women on campus—students, staff, faculty. No, it was not an issue.

**Reti:** Okay. This is just something that's come up at other points in the oral history, so I was curious.

**Olsen:** Well, I think that when it does come up in other places, for sure, and I would assume it's the same at UCSC, it's really a way of saying something else, of saying, "This is not important. Uniting women is just not important." In fact, we were very clear that just having a house where all women were made welcome was crucial for the well-being of every single woman in that county, including the women on that campus. Just being a presence was important. And so, to say that using the money for that purpose is not appropriate is missing the point of why you need to have a women's center. You need to have a place where women feel safe. That's a damn shame! I wish it weren't so. But that's the truth. And we are half the population. Hello? So no, it's not a waste. It's not only not a waste, they should be putting a lot more money into it than they do. And in fact, when off-campus groups wanted to use the facility for something that was not clearly . . . if it was not a non-profit group, if it was for somebody's wedding, or for something like that, we would charge money. It's not like we would use student money for that.

**Reti:** No, that would be a fundraiser, right?

**Olsen:** Exactly. It would be a way to add money to the budget. It helped. It didn't hurt them. It was another source of revenue. Yeah. Don't ever let anybody give you that crap. It's just not right.

**Reti:** Well, it's good to put that in the historical record.

**Olsen:** Well, the people who do, are the people who really don't get why you need a women's center. When they bring that topic up then the answer has to be to educate them about why you need a women's center for *all* the women of UCSC. The mental health of the women who staff and/or teach at UCSC is vital to the mental health of the students.

**Reti:** Okay.

### **Building Bridges**

**Olsen:** I feel very grateful to . . . My kids worked hard there. My husband worked hard there. There were a lot of community women . . . The wonderful poet, Maude Meehan, came up and helped a lot. She would show up at things. If we had writers reading, she would come to support them and cheer them on. When Adrienne Rich moved to Santa Cruz, she also was supportive in that way. She'd come to events to cheer on people and say, "Good for you," show her woman-to-woman support. I have a bunch of photographs from the goodbye party from when I left, which show this eclectic group of people who came to say goodbye to me, which was very sweet. But the point is that it included as many people from off-campus as on. Women staff, women students, women faculty. That's a tribute to the Women's Center as much as it is to me. I think probably more to the Women's Center than it was to me. These people knew me, or most of them, because of my work at the Women's Center. And that's pretty great. And you will also see both Bruce Moore and Lee Duffus front and center there. They were terrific.

**Reti:** That's a testament to how the Women's Center was able to build a bridge not only between the community and the university, but also to the administration.

**Olsen:** Yes. So, did we do all the things we wanted to do? No. We were brand-new. We didn't know what we were doing. We were learning. But we did a lot of good things and I felt very proud of the board. They weathered the storm of the loss of their first director. They dealt with it in a very positive and brave way. They faced going on, and didn't get dissuaded. They stood up for the right of women to have a place on campus, and the need for women to have a place on campus, against tremendous pressure to do otherwise.

### Challenges and Dreams

**Reti:** You did a lot, and there were a lot of challenges, because it was at the very beginning of an organization. What kinds of challenges were coming up? I know there were budgetary challenges.

**Olsen:** Well, there was a budgetary challenge because there was so much that we wanted to do, a lot of which would take woman power that we couldn't afford to pay for.

**Reti:** Like what?

**Olsen:** If I could have I would have had a masseuse there once a month for the women on staff. If I could have, we would have sponsored people's academic research into various things that they wanted to have time and money to research, and they didn't. We never could do anything like that. If we could have done anything that we wanted, we would have been sponsoring consortia on all sorts of topics, bringing people in to help our students and faculty learn things from each other. We couldn't do those kinds of things. We never had that kind of money. So it was always a challenge to try to come up with more money. If we could have, I wish we could have had a counselor on staff



available to help young women who would feel safer in a woman-only environment. We never could do that, although we had a very good relationship with the counseling staff, particularly because of Carol Whitehill. But to have somebody on-site would have made a difference, because if somebody's in distress, they don't always go where you send them. They come to you for help. There were always things that we wished we had money for that we didn't have money for. It would have been nice to have a little more money to furnish the place without having to haunt the Salvation Army.

**Reti:** (laughter)

**Olsen:** (laughter) Or a library. We wanted to have a library at Cardiff House of certain things, and we never were able to do that.

**Reti:** What kinds of things would you have liked to have had in the library?

**Olsen:** Oh, I don't remember exact titles, but I can tell you the kinds of things. Sometimes someone would come to us saying, "Do you know about research about *x*, *y*, or *z*? Or how I could look up such and such?" We'd just send them up to the library to talk to a reference librarian. But women's studies was breaking out all over the country. Wouldn't it have been great to have had all of that stuff right there, right at hand?

**Reti:** Yes.

**Olsen:** We couldn't do that. And in fact the main library didn't always want to buy the stuff that we thought should be purchased.

**Reti:** This was before there was a women's studies librarian at the University Library?

**Olsen:** Yes. Although I'm trying to remember. There was a wonderful woman at the library who did her best for us.

**Reti:** Was it Jacquelyn Marie?

**Olsen:** Yes.

**Reti:** Okay. She ultimately ended up being the women's studies librarian, but that was later.

**Olsen:** I'm not surprised. Because she always got it. I would say, "Look, there's this incredible stuff happening in English literature right now. Monographs have just been published, and can you get them for us?" She would always try. She couldn't get them for us, but sometimes she could get them up there, which was great. She was wonderful. She's a person who helped a tremendous amount.

There was somebody in Student Employment who helped us find wonderful student workers and helped wonderful student workers find us. I can't remember her name.

**Reti:** You're doing really well remembering things that happened twenty years ago.

## **Moving On**

**Olsen:** It was a long time ago. Well, it was wonderful work. You asked a question [on the question outline] about, how did you avoid burnout. I never felt burned out. I would still be there, but for family reasons. As much as it was a great place to raise our kids when they were little, Santa Cruz was not a good place to raise teenagers. And Charley was a whistleblower at UCSC before there were any real protections there, and got run

out of his job, wasn't exonerated from that one until four years later. We just decided we were going to leave, find us a community that would be good for teenagers. Our oldest daughter had entered middle-school and it was awful. So we scoured the country looking for a place where they celebrated their teenagers. We found two communities, and we said if we get a job in either one, we're going. And we did! I got a job at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, and it was the best thing we could have done for our family. It was absolutely the right thing to do. But boy, did it break my heart to leave that job. I loved being there. I loved the energy of the women's movement at that time, discovering all this stuff and getting so excited about all this stuff. We were growing everything from music to—you name it, biology. It was pretty wonderful.

**Reti:** So true. Such a rich period.

**Olsen:** So it was hard for me to leave, and I felt a tremendous loyalty and affection to the people there. I really wish I could have stayed to work with Beatriz. It would have been so fun to work with her. But we had to do what we had to do for our family. And I have never been sorry about the decision, because it was so great for our kids, who have never stopped thanking us. That's important.

So I stayed until they could get Beatriz hired. That took a while, to find her. I think they did two searches. They did one, and they didn't find exactly what they wanted. And then they did another and Beatriz surfaced. She said, "Okay. I'll do it." (laughter) Because part of I think what everybody was feeling was that we needed somebody who understood UCSC, and the women's movement, and who could do outreach to the Hispanic community, and the women of color on campus. Beatriz was all those things.

Diane was a woman of many good ideas. The work that I wanted to do with the women on staff she thought was great. She said, "Go for it." There are some people who might not have gotten that. Why would you put resources and time into providing a masseuse for the women on staff? What does that have to do with the Women's Center? She got it that that had to do with the Women's Center. She absolutely got it. She thought that was great. The same with the art exhibit at Christmas time, of showing only staff members. She got it. She thought it was great. She helped to set up and equip that building with no money, with no budget, and she did it with great good humor and style. When the S & M group came and said they wanted to have meetings there she said, "Of course. We are a place to make the marginalized feel comfortable." I think that that took real courage. I don't know what she had to go through up at Student Services on that, but I betcha it was interesting.

**Reti:** That was a big, controversial issue at that time.

**Olsen:** Oh, you bet! You bet! And she's the one who had to go up there and sit down with Bruce [Moore] and look him in the face and say, "No. These people are important to us." And try to get him to understand that. That was her job. And she did it. More power to her. And she was away from her home and she only had one of her kids with her, so that was hard. That was really hard. And it's like any other new community. It takes a long time to find your place, and I don't think she was ever able to really find her place there.

**Reti:** Yes. Well, Santa Cruz can be a hard place to break into the community.

**Olsen:** It is! It is a hard place. And I had all kinds of advantages she didn't have in that regard. So my hat goes off to her in that way. It was not easy. She worked terribly long hours, as did I. There were two of us and we had three, sometimes four student employees. At that point I was doing all the bookkeeping. We did all of our own posters, our own flyers, our own outreach. We did everything. We were a two-woman band. We worked very hard. She worked hard. She gave it her best. It just wasn't the right place for her.

**Reti:** Right. So now you've been at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland since you left?

**Olsen:** No. I left Shakespeare. I've now been away from Shakespeare for almost five years. They're still like my family. They are still my home. I just finished producing something for them. But I hung out my own shingle. I'm doing two things. One is I'm a contract program officer who gives away money for a foundation. And the other thing I do is consulting for nonprofit boards on strategic planning, and raising money, and board development, and things like that.

**Reti:** Great! Well, is there anything you'd like to add?

## **A Different World**

**Olsen:** No, except that . . . Those of you who are still at it, I want you to keep at it. We haven't won. We made huge strides. It is a different world than it was twenty years ago. We have made great strides forward. The young women whom I work with and I meet with today are horrified when they hear that I had never met a woman college president. They are horrified to know that I'd never seen a woman drive a truck. When I give them

my mother's book *Silences* and they look down the lists of how many men and how few women have won literary awards of all sorts, they're horrified! They can't believe it. These young women, by and large, within the constraints of their class, which is really what we haven't dealt with yet . . . They know they can do anything that the men in their class can do. No doubt about it. They can build buildings. They can drive trucks. They can be teachers. They can be doctors. They don't feel . . . Now, some of that is naiveté, but for us it was front and center. I never would have dreamed that I could do the things that they do. When I tell them that we didn't have . . . "What do you mean you didn't play soccer?" We didn't even have soccer available for girls. We didn't have girls' intramurals when I was in high school. They can't believe it! They just can't believe it. This is like hearing ancient history for them. Well, you know what? We have to take credit for that! That's wonderful.

**Reti:** You're right.

**Olsen:** That's wonderful. And it wasn't like the men sat down one day and said, "Oh, gee. Let's let them have soccer. Oh, gee, let's let a woman be president, just to be nice." Sorry folks. That's not how it happened. We changed the debate and we pushed the limits. We haven't fixed it. But by God, we made big differences. You guys just have to do the rest now. (laughter) Don't stop. We haven't got far enough yet. I'm really glad to know it's still there.

**Reti:** Me too.

**Olsen:** Yeah, I'm really glad to know it's still there.

**Reti:** Yes, and this is a good time to pause, at the twentieth anniversary of the Women's Center, and celebrate and contemplate the accomplishments of the last twenty years.

**Olsen:** You bet. And to see them as substantive. I mean, they really are substantive. It's not just . . . and I'm not minimizing this . . . it's not just the young woman who found comfort and solace while she was coming to terms with her own sexuality because she had a safe place to go and talk to loving people. It's not just the faculty member who was able to have a meeting with her two or three women colleagues in a secret place on that campus to talk about what was scaring her about her work. It's not just those individual triumphs that we had. It's bigger. It's got to do with the difference in the quality of the debate, and it's got to do with the difference in the quality of the work that women are doing, sometimes without realizing how marvelously different it is than it than it was twenty years ago.

**Reti:** I know. Twenty years doesn't seem like that long ago, but so much has changed in that twenty years.

**Olsen:** Oh, my God. It's huge. It's just huge. I'm not saying we made a revolution. But we sure lit the fire of one, and we've still got the embers of it. And we better blow on it and keep going.



Cardiff House surroundings, circa 1985



Beatriz and Simone. Photo by Annie Valva. All Rights Reserved.

## **Beatriz Lopez-Flores**

*Beatriz Lopez-Flores was hired as the Women's Center director in September 1986 and held that position until 1994. She contributed a long history of activism with organizations such as the United Farm Workers of America to the Women's Center, as well as a background in radio and other kinds of media. Immediately before she was hired as the Women's Center director, Lopez-Flores worked for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at UCSC as an outreach counselor. She brought a strong tradition of women of color feminism to the center, as well as tremendous energy, innovative ideas, and much political acuity. Lopez-Flores is now director for the Graduate Advising Diversity Programs in the College of Engineering at UC Berkeley. I interviewed her in her office at UC Berkeley on March 29, 2005. —Irene Reti*



## Early Life

**Reti:** Okay, Beatriz, I finally got you here in your office and I can see you are just as busy as you were at the Women's Center! Why don't we start today by you telling me where you were born, and where you grew up.

**Lopez-Flores:** Well, I was born in Tabasco in southern Mexico, which makes me pretty unique. In my forty-plus years of living in the United States I've never met anybody from my home state of Tabasco, including when I did public radio. I put a notice out [on the air], if anybody [in the Monterey Bay area] was from the state of Tabasco to contact the radio station in Salinas. Nobody responded. So to this date I have yet to meet anybody from my home state in the United States. I come from southern Mexico, which is traditionally a very different state. Very few people come to the United States from where my parents and I came from.

I have two siblings. All of us went to college. All of us are a product of the University of California. My mother was probably the first feminist that I met. She was pro-choice and she planned her children. I was the only daughter. When she got her dream she quit. Two boys and myself.

My mother worked in a packing house, and my father worked in the fields. In the early seventies my father supported Cesar Chavez and . . . We were not raised Catholic. So for me it was very easy to be accepting of people that were different, because *we* were different. And my parents believed that what you do on this earth is what matters. Philosophically that went very well with becoming a feminist.

## Coming to the UCSC Women's Center

I knew it was very competitive when I went for the position to become the director. They had just hired a woman who had all the right credentials on paper, but after being on the

job for six months . . . Everyone felt bad. The expectations were higher, but at the same time everybody wanted to make sure this [new] person would succeed and so we all tried harder to work together.

The hiring committee was not only large, but inclusive of people with diverse points of views for the center. There was certainly a significant commitment to give a woman of color the benefit to compete and succeed. They wanted a woman who could work with the various political philosophies in the area.

The powers that be for the Women's Center when I came on board was a board of directors that included some very big hitters who continue to be the most prominent people in the Santa Cruz area, like Mardi Wormhoudt. There were writers, graduate students, senior faculty, a former faculty dean, staff, and undergraduate students. You had a very, very diverse group of people. These people were not typical, stereotypically anything. And then you had Student Services as a unit [which] had to be dragged to have a women's center, and had no idea what it was.

So when I interviewed for the job, you had these twelve people sitting in a conference room. It was the largest interview committee I had ever seen! The committee had excellent questions and I remember one question most vividly. A professor asked, (dramatic voice) *"If I was to ask, who has influenced you the most in becoming a feminist, who would you credit?"* My answer was swift and I have always believed it got me the job. I said *"Well, my feminism starts with the first feminist of this continent, and she is Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz."* I [mentioned] Simone de Beauvoir, and said that most of the people who had influenced my feminism were non-USA feminists.

I also mentioned that I had mostly been reading essays by Adrienne Rich. I did not know that she was a local resident and well-known by some of the women in the committee. In fact, someone also had a cat named Sor Juana, so without knowing it, I ended up being

among a group of women who shared my opinions and knew about Sor Juana! By the time I mentioned Alfonsina Estorni, an Argentinian writer, the group was taking notes and approvingly thinking that I knew some things.

Why was this important? Because in the early 1980s feminism was composed primarily of people in the humanities. It was a time when for American feminists it was still this juxtaposition of Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan. But for intellectual feminists, it was always about the *literati* who had influenced and impacted social change, like Emma Goldman and Simone de Beauvoir. So there I was quoting Emma Goldman saying, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your revolution." I had all these quotes that just seemed to fit perfectly, without my even knowing who the women in the committee were, and how close to their hearts these women were!

**Reti:** Were you already working on campus?

**Lopez-Flores:** I was on campus, but I was recruiting at EOP. So I was hardly ever on campus. But because I was a literature major, and most of the people here were literature people, we just happened to hit it off appropriately.

**Reti:** Did you attend UCSC as a student?

**Lopez-Flores:** No. I went to UC Riverside, and then UCLA. I ended up in Santa Cruz because [Professor] Ralph Guzman was one of my consultants in a radio production I had on *corridos*, Spanish ballads. He took a liking to me and said, "You've got to move to Santa Cruz! You have *got* to move to Santa Cruz." Then there was this opening and I applied. I never saw Ralph again when I worked at UC Santa Cruz. But that was the connection. That's how I ended up in Santa Cruz. There was another professor that I interviewed, Wally Goldfrank. So anyway, that was from another part of my life, which is the farm workers movement.

Once I got the position it was very clear to me that I didn't have to be closeted about my intellectual love for things that were not typical. I did not have to be a Betty Friedan fan, whose blend of feminism I could not stand. I didn't have to be in that strand. I supported Gloria Steinem and believed that the political was personal, that feminism was being pro-choice, that economics is important. My politics have been less about identity, and more about class and activism for social change.

Then they had to sell me to Student Services. I had two bosses in those days, although I was always very clear who really were my bosses, and that was the Women's Center board of directors.

**Reti:** So you had the board of directors and you had Student Services both supervising you?

**Lopez-Flores:** I had the board of directors and I had the best . . . To this day, I would say Lee Duffus has been one of the most solid, incredible managers I've ever had. I knew it then and was reminded once I took business school classes later on. I'm still friends with Lee. He was a person who understood structures and understood power. He knew that the power of the Women's Center rested with the faculty and the students. Except that students could always go in different directions. He taught me to remember that I would be a better advocate if I also remembered that I was an administrator. Lee Duffus always understood the unique role of the Women's Center. Other Student Services units were often easily intimidated by faculty. I love working with faculty.

I also had to pass the test with Kathie Olsen, who was the assistant under my predecessor. Well, the only reason to bring up my predecessor was that everyone gave me a honeymoon. The difference when I became director was that everyone was on their absolutely best behavior.

**Reti:** Because they were all terrified that they were going to lose another director?

**Lopez-Flores:** They didn't want to lose another director. They had learned a lesson, which was that this person had the hard task of reporting to different people. In many ways what one had to do was to learn to navigate. Looking back, it was all about navigating the different perspectives. The ideal was that this Women's Center, which was so different from all the other UCs, was supposed to succeed in serving a very different and active faculty and student population. It was formed in 1985 so there were a lot of lessons learned from other centers [already.] By the time this Women's Center came about, it was about including community. Very different from other women's centers. The women also realized that they did not want a student service unit without the intellectual aspect to a women's center. Those were some of the fears I think that they had. They didn't want it to be a complacent place [which focused only on] service. They wanted it to be an intellectual environment for women to be academically engaged, at the same time that they practiced social change. That meant that you had completely an open field. I mean, you could do anything.

Kathie Olsen had a say in who got to be the director, which was pretty different from any other unit, because here's the person that is going to report to you having the power to say yes or nay. Kathie really could have gone for the position. Kathie had the degree. Kathie had the respect. Did Kathie just need the self-confidence? Or was it that she was a parent, and she decided not to go for it? [But] for me, after meeting Kathie, it was like, wait a second, what's wrong with this picture? Why didn't Kathie go for the position? So that made it challenging for me too, because I knew that once I got the job I needed to work with Kathie in a collaborative way and not make the implied mistakes of my predecessor.

Kathie really did understand. Not only was she from the community, but she was a close friend of a lot of people who had envisioned the Women's Center. So we spent a lot of time talking. Kathie trained me. Kathie right away told me that she was leaving, which

was why she hadn't gone for the position herself. Her husband wanted to leave Santa Cruz, and so did she. They had other plans. So in her training there were certain things that she shared with me that I probably would not have known otherwise. There was no other way of having that kind of training on the job, because she had been the interim director for enough time to learn how to navigate. She gave me an insight about Student Services [and told] me some of the things that had happened with my predecessor. [She gave me] tips on how to work with the different board members, which was a faster way of truly getting on board. I got hired in September. I seem to always take a new job in September.

Kathie was very different from me. Kathie was more, what I call now, touchy-feely. But she really was very grounded politically. Politically we saw the world with the same glasses. She hadn't been in the big interview committee, but had heard different things about how I had done in the interview. Kathie gave me all of those insights into who the competition had been, and sort of built me up in a way that made me feel like we were going to have a honeymoon. And she also was very protective. She was there for only a very short period of time, the whole first quarter. I think Arlyn [Osborne] came on board in January. She even helped me select Arlyn. Now, looking back, it seems like it was a piece of cake, but at the time the expectations of the center were extreme. Everybody had an expectation. So Kathie and I worked really as equals, although having a socialist mentality . . . I knew that I made . . . we both knew I made more money. We used to talk about those things seriously, but jokingly, too, that the buck stopped with me. We didn't pretend that this was . . . We were collaborative people, but I made more money. We were not under the false illusion that we were equal in the university hierarchy. She came from a socialist background. We used to talk about all of these things very openly [in a way that] I think was unique. There was never any pretense.

I don't have children. I've never cared much for children, [gone] crazy over kids. I mean, I like intelligent kids, but I had no experience and no interest. Kathie had all of that. So when replacing Kathie, all of those things had to be taken into account. Instead of thinking, oh my gosh, hiring a person who is a single parent of boys, or any of those things were going to be a negative, instead they were a positive. The center had an obligation to be considerate of that. Even though . . . for anybody working in the university, you know . . . people are going to be sick, and [since we were] such a small unit I had to, as a director, balance those things. Kathie had kids so she was more sensitive to the needs of parents. There was a group of women who met at the Women's Center with children. I forget what the group was called, but it was a group of women from Family Student Housing, mostly the wives of international graduate students or visiting scholars. They lived in Family Student Housing, and they used to meet on Wednesdays at the Women's Center. Kathie was the one who had really nurtured that relationship. There were all these things that would irritate me when I didn't know what they were for. For example, one couldn't open a cabinet because they had safety locks. Well, what did I know about safety locks? I didn't have children. Kathie had child-proofed the house. I mean, I never used the term "child-proofed."

### **The Blue Ladies**

Little things like that helped to create a real collegial relationship between Kathie and myself, in addition to the Blue Ladies. They're famous! The Blue Ladies were these women who dressed in blue, who were part of the Women's Center. Kathie had developed a relationship with these women. Kathie introduced me to them. These two women used to come to the Women's Center and cook their potatoes every day. And Kathie said, "Listen, there are these two women that you are going to find a little strange, but don't mess with them. They are astrologers, and I know you don't believe in any of that. But trust me. They're usually right about the weather." I said, "Well, then they're

weather girls." And we kind of laughed. She said, "You be nice, Bea. They are very different from anyone you've met, but they care about the Women's Center. They come and cook here, and they don't do any harm, and they actually are cheap labor. They help out. They put the chairs out for us and do all these things. Plus, in this community they're like gurus." There were so many different things, and political expectations of the Women's Center. You have astrologers that other people thought were very special, and even though that wasn't necessarily what I had in mind about attracting people from the community, Kathie had been there and she had a sense of what was good for the Women's Center.

So here you have the wives of international students with children, coming on Wednesdays with their kids, and they felt welcome. Then there were these two Blue Ladies who came and baked their potatoes and talked about things, and would always give us advice, when not to have an event because the moon was in retrograde and all this other stuff. Kathie was always nice to people. These Blue Ladies always spoke about me in the third person. But they liked me.

Then there was the gardener, Dorothy Healy, who made the Women's Center look beautiful. It was during my tenure that we started renting the facilities for weddings. We needed to make money. The Women's Center was created in 1985, and starting a whole new unit in Student Services was expensive. So we were supposed to also be innovative in fundraising. We decided that hey, this is a beautiful historical home with beautiful roses. And Dorothy always got along with Kathie. I guess my predecessor hadn't really taken to Dorothy. But Dorothy was really loyal to the Women's Center. She always helped out. She was always there.



## **The Challenges of Serving Staff**

When Kathie decided to leave, we hired Arlyn Osborne. Arlyn was a different personality, but a little bit more like Kathie in a sense that she had a sensitivity to parents. It was a very calculated balance that we established. I established it with Kathie and then with Arlyn. Arlyn was more of a listener. She wasn't as outgoing as Kathie, but it was a good balance for me because Arlyn, in having a strong sense of listening, could also sense what was happening with the staff. She was much more committed to staff. That was a much more neglected group. It was always hard, because the funding and everything was always about faculty and students, and because it did fall under Student Services, the relationship with the faculty was again to support student endeavors. The board wanted us to also serve staff, but it was mostly a token gesture. I mean, there's no money there. And then there was a political perspective too, that if staff wanted empowerment they should organize and establish unions, or strengthen their unions. So staff was never our strong suit, although for both Arlyn and me, and with the support of people like Marge [Frantz], it was always important for the staff women to feel that the Women's Center also belonged to them.

### **Social Change and Intellectual Feminism: There was Never a Separation**

But in practice the priority was the students, the faculty, and community women. And [our commitment to] community women was truly from a collaborative, political agenda. All the events were open to everyone, but it was always with the understanding that we would assist in having women's organizations from the community feel that they have access to the university, but for us not to duplicate what they were doing. That was one of the mandates. It always was about intellectual feminism and the personal commitment to social change. Social change was in capitals and intellectual feminism was in capitals for us. For me, it was the reason I took the job.

**Reti:** Not social change?

**Lopez-Flores:** Well, to me they go hand-in-hand. The reality is if you work at a university it isn't just about social change because social change is also learning. We had a task. We were part of a university. This is why there was such closeness between the staff and the board during my tenure: I never saw intellectual feminism as anything but social change. You can't have social change without having an intellectual commitment to it. To me, there was never a separation. It was like people who spent a lot of time talking about color, gender preference and all this. You know what? I'm a woman. I'm a woman of color. They go hand-in-hand. I don't split the two, and I don't dramatize it either. It's not going to change. Now, things are possible to change. But for me it was like, you know what? I was born a woman and I'm a Latina. And both of them were never going to change, because I thought this was something I could not do anything about, nor would I want to! Eventually I grew with the center and a lot of other things started to happen, where . . . you thought somebody was a woman, and they weren't a woman. That was a whole different story which I came to appreciate with growing pains and with the changing times.

### **The Women's Center Policy Board**

So whenever I was confronted with a controversial issue that I myself didn't believe in Arlyn and I would take it to the board. For example, in the late 1980s people started to flirt with ideas of sadomasochism. And there was [the idea] that prostitutes had the right to organize and all of this . . . I might have had a personal view. I thought, wow, this is what you get when you have identity politics, people who are looking to dramatize their lives. I really thought it was a white upper-class thing; the whole sadomasochism bullshit was bullshit for me. That was my position. But when I was confronted with a group of women wanting to have a safe haven for their sadomasochism, I was . . . I had to take it seriously. Now, my own personal view was: this was bullshit. But when confronted with an intellectual challenge like that, I was astute enough to know that it

was also part of a group of people exploring . . . especially in a university, people were intellectualizing sadomasochism, and it was a phase that some women were going through, and they had a right to go through this phase, even if I myself was appalled by it. My own personal opinion on the subject was an opinion that I had the right to verbalize. But I did not have the right to make the decision on my own.

So those were the kind of nice things that the board loved to take on, (laughter) and that Arlyn and I took to the board. Had we taken it on on our own we would have stumbled . . . we would have walked right into a situation where we thought everybody on the board would agree with us. And in fact, they didn't. It was a funny, somewhat disrespectful discussion. For example, someone said, "Oh yes, I'm going to bring my chain." People were making fun. Then it turned out somebody within the group, a new, potential member [who was] really never on the board, but she was [there] in an advisory capacity, took offense. It was a difficult situation, but it was resolved with the sadomasochistic group allowed to meet at the Women's Center. They could have a room, but we would not guarantee the whole house for privacy. The only group that we ever guaranteed the entire house, and therefore privacy, were survivors of sexual abuse. But everybody else, hey, they wanted to meet in a public place, they were welcome to, but we were not going to give them the whole house. If they were worried about it they could find another venue. They did. And it turned out that the group that had approached us was really there to challenge us. They only met there once. We made the right decision.

So it was learning to navigate these sometimes petty situations. And why do I say this? Because if you think of somebody of the caliber of a Mardi Wormhoudt, a very serious policy maker, engaging in these types of discussions, you understand better the times, and importance of the center in attracting strong feminists who also had the patience to endure these discussions. Nevertheless, she was at the board meetings. Then you had

people like Marge [Frantz], who was always much more expansive about difference. We also had faculty like political science professor Sonia Alvarez. And to me one of the biggest pleasures of having the board was Carolyn Clark. She really did more for the Women's Center than anyone besides Marge, because she was then Kresge Provost, kind, political, and she also engaged with the administration, even with administrators who were sometimes controversial and difficult. We had these women coming to the board meetings, which is really a testament to how much they were engaged. It was wonderful. We also had controversial people like Gillian Greensite. Sometimes Gillian vehemently disagreed with the Women's Center and our concern for sexual harassment, or how we went about things, and yet she stayed on the board. The board was comprised of people who were very different, and who sometimes would take each other on publicly. But we always navigated each other in a respectful way. I don't know if that continued, because I know that a lot of these women are no longer on the board, and the faculty didn't stay as engaged. But those were the times. It was a real pleasure and a real privilege to work at the Women's Center during my eight years.

It was also the times which made it so special. Women's studies was still only a program, and so the Women's Center was always supposed to be the social arm of women's studies. Women's studies was in its infancy. They did not have anyone who was a full-time professor of women's studies. Bettina Aptheker became the first, and it was at a time that they were still struggling for that recognition. The Women's Center also came about at the same time as funding for the Feminist Studies FRA. We always did things jointly. For instance, Anna Deavere Smith went on to become famous, but we were one of the first groups that gave her a chance to speak when no one knew who she was. We paid her a hundred dollars. She was a friend of Bettina [Aptheker's]. She was at the time teaching theater at Stanford so we invited her to UCSC. The Women's Center always worked in tandem with the FRA. The events were held at the Women's Center. Whether it was Ursula Le Guinn, or a professor like Carla Freccero wanting to present her paper

on Madonna . . . Anything goes. Any kind of intellectual, cutting-edge, let's-see-how-this-goes presentation occurred through the FRA, the Women's Center, or both. Most of them were co-sponsored. At different times faculty would call and say, "Listen, I have a friend who's coming." We'd give them a token honorarium and it always paid off. But I think more than anything what I'll always remember during that period was that it was a lot of fun.

**Reti:** Why was it fun?

## Programming

**Lopez-Flores:** It was always fun because it was intellectually stimulating. I think that the Women's Center brought more interesting people to the campus than even Arts and Lectures. It was the Women's Center that could fill the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium for Gloria Steinem<sup>1</sup> or Dolores Huerta. And it was always about community social change; it was about what was happening in the country. The Women's Center would sponsor an event if there was a war. We always could shift gears, depending on what was happening in the country. We always took positions. Our opinions were important. The [student] newspaper *City on a Hill* used to meet at the Women's Center. The police used to look out for the Women's Center because they could come and have coffee. Kathie's upbringing was very open, and she was so Santa Cruzan that in fact it was contagious. Arlyn and I did the same thing. Students held a march against war and we were there! Graduate students were blocking the entrance to campus; we were there making sure they were okay. The administration always understood our role as student advocates and supporters. Whatever was happening was important if it involved faculty and students.

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<sup>1</sup>Gloria Steinem and Dolores Huerta appeared together in a program called "The Political is Personal: An Agenda for the 1990s" on March 9, 1992 at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium.

I also remember that somebody we cared about was diagnosed with cancer. I don't remember who it was. But I remember when this person was diagnosed with cancer and we were all devastated, we immediately had an event on cancer. That was the first time I found out that Marge Frantz had had cancer, that I found out that my friend Connie had had cancer. We had an event and these people came out, came out as being survivors. It was again an empowering thing. Immediately as something happened, we held an educational event. I remember that we were the first ones on campus to have an event focused on women survivors of AIDS. The event was coordinated with our local AIDS groups. These were the kinds of things the community expected us to do. We didn't do it alone. We always partnered with whoever was the appropriate organization. By co-sponsoring events we got publicity. The press would cover our events. I had a media background and [I believed] it was important to collaborate with existing organizations.

If there was a war, or thoughts of a war, we always reacted to the moment. The earthquake. It was very much expected that the Women's Center would take a leadership role because of our connection with the community. So when the [Loma Prieta] earthquake happened, we could, through the university, organize volunteers and send them to Watsonville. Lee always said, "Do it." Permission never had to be asked. It was assumed that it was part of who we were. It didn't have to be, "Well, why is the Women's Center involved in that?" "Well, things are happening to people!" We never allowed ourselves to be narrow or mere bystanders.

### **Men as Allies**

Another thing was that men always felt that they could take part, which was sometimes controversial. They didn't take a leadership role, but they were part of the center. Socialists are often thinking there's some agent in the group, or somebody who is provoking to try to close us down. [But] we were always very clear that this is a public institution and we were open to all, and we were there to serve all. To advance women's

causes you need to bring everybody along. And we had a whole group of male faculty that if necessary, would help us address the issues about why the center needed to exist. At one point people tried to challenge the fact that it was all women who were on the board. And we said, "No, no. We have supporters." We had them lined up ready to be on the board. We always anticipated these things. And we had enough friends. So when we had retirement parties and there were men who had been supportive, well, we celebrated them as well. For example, we didn't only have a retirement party for Marta Morello-Frosch; we also included William Domhoff. We always included people who had been supportive of the Women's Center. There were a lot of high-level people that respected the Women's Center. Part of it was the idea of inclusion. What we did have going for us at that time too is that *City on a Hill* was a very strong paper and they always were looking for stories. You had people like Rose Dean, Rachel Lurie, and Annie Valva working at *City on a Hill* who believed in the center. They were just always looking for stories and we were always willing to provide them with some stories. (laughter)

### Mentoring Student Leaders

**Reti:** Let's zero in on some specific events. Were you involved in the cannery strike in Watsonville?

**Lopez-Flores:** That was in 1985. We had them come speak on the campus.<sup>2</sup> I think that was an event that was co-sponsored with community studies. We never tried to duplicate what others did better. We basically allowed different groups to take leadership, where we lent our name, or we got the place. I think the cannery workers met at the Women's Center because we had the space. I remember sponsoring a big

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<sup>2</sup>Beginning in September 1985 an eighteen-month long cannery strike took place in Watsonville, California. Mostly Mexicana/Chicana women chained themselves to the factory gates to preserve health benefits. This strike involved 2000 workers and drew support from every major Latino organization in northern California.

event that was really organized by students. The students felt that they could count on the center to provide them with legitimacy, the resources for them to do their organizing. I don't remember the specifics, but what I do remember is that there were always student leaders. The role of the Women's Center was not to usurp leadership, but to always try to identify students who were already engaged in social change, and then to support that. And because we had such a strong relationship with faculty, the faculty would tell students to go to the Women's Center. We were always seen as a resource for faculty, and for research. It wasn't only Nancy Stoller in community studies. It wasn't only the women faculty. Sometimes it was Mike Rotkin, Carter Wilson, Wally Goldfrank. People who didn't even get along with each other were supportive of the Women's Center.

During the earthquake, who I remember very distinctively taking a very active role was one of my best mentors and protectors at UC Santa Cruz, Susan Burcaw. At the time when I started working there she was the executive assistant to the chancellor, and like myself was *ex officio* to the Committee on the Status of Women, which advised the chancellor. There was this whole other group of people who were much more establishment—faculty and administrators who also had a relationship to the Women's Center, besides the board of directors. It was always important that I navigate the different groups within the university. Susan represented the most mainstream bureaucrats, but also just believed in what we were doing. A year later, she went on to become an assistant chancellor to Bruce Moore in Student Services. During the earthquake she and I organized the volunteers for Watsonville. I mean, here's a very straight, bureaucrat *par excellence* woman who also moved quickly to help in Watsonville in a time of crisis. We believed that we needed to keep the students busy. We organized about 105 volunteers from UC Santa Cruz and sent them to Watsonville and around Santa Cruz. Instead of them feeling sorry for themselves, we sent them down to Watsonville, because that's where they needed help, some as translators working for FEMA. The beautiful thing about social change is that it always creates community.



I think for both Arlyn and myself it was just all those things that happen in life were always part of what made the Women's Center what it was. So you felt like, shoot, I'm getting paid to be politically correct. We were always doing things differently. To take back the terms, I always prefer being politically incorrect. We did a lot of things that were not mainstream, things that challenged even our own beliefs. For example, when Wendy Chapkis, a graduate student, first wanted us to organize sex workers (it wasn't prostitutes, it was sex workers!), we thought, okay, here's a grad student who is doing research on this. Of course the board is going to support it. Of course we had to be open-minded, because it was educational. I had never watched pornography. Wendy . . . I mean, we actually would show pornography. These things that we showed sometimes were like . . . I don't know if today one would do this. But in those days all was possible! First of all, the Women's Center felt that it was important to take risks. And the board always supported us. We always did it as a community. And we always collaborated. Kresge College sometimes had more money, so we would do it together. But I gave them cover. We gave each other cover. Marty Wollesen, Student Activities Director for Kresge College, and the center became very good friends and collaborators. We always had programs together. For example, among various activities, we also helped Margaret Daniel, a History of Consciousness grad student with the founding of the Women of Color Film Festival—an activity which went on to become an annual event at Kresge. The students did the work, and Marty, Arlyn and I would help them find the funding, and let them do it!

You had the art gallery at the Women's Center. That really was spearheaded by Arlyn. But again, the approach was that even when we had thought of the idea, what we did then was to get a student to follow-up, to implement it. That was Hinano [Campton]. She collaborated with Lisa Ow of the Ow family. You always saw these kind of collaborations. I think that the reason we were able to do all of that is that we were really open to the leadership that people could provide. Arlyn's role, and mine, was to enable

all these possibilities to happen. I think more than anything we saw our role as catalysts. We could do it. But we didn't have to do it by ourselves. It was always more fun this way, seeing students blossom and own their projects.

### **Toni Morrison**

When you have someone like a Toni Morrison wanting to come to Santa Cruz, it didn't take any effort. It only took a phone call. It took a phone call from a faculty. The way that Toni Morrison ended up coming to Santa Cruz was typical of how everything happened at the Women's Center. A faculty member called and said, "I have a friend who would like to come to Santa Cruz. I would like to visit with her. We haven't seen each other for a long time. Now, she won't be cheap, Bea. But I know that you will want to have her. I know she's one of your favorites." I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. How much?" For us it was going to be very inexpensive. She really commands . . . I don't know, the figure [fee] was 50K or 20K. And this was in 1992. My philosophy was, say yes, and then figure it out. She wouldn't tell me who it was, but we were negotiating about how much it would cost the center!

**Reti:** You didn't even know who it was!

**Lopez-Flores:** We didn't even know who it was. No. But I knew the faculty member, and I knew that we had always had wonderful recommendations. And she just really wanted this person to come. I said "Okay, how much?" She said, "I think it's going to have to be five thousand, eight thousand." I said, "Ooh. Wow! And we can't do it at the Civic?" She said, "No, she wants it to be on campus." I thought, well, let's see, we can get the colleges to . . . "Well, who is it? A musician?" She said "No. I just know that she's your favorite!" (laughter) I said, "Okay, well, I only have one person and I know it's not her, because I know how much she costs." And she said, "Who is that?" I said, "Toni

Morrison." She said, "Well, you can get her for five thousand." I said, "Whoa!" (Or something like that.) It was Angela [Davis] who was recommending Toni.

Then you find out the story. Toni was the person who enabled Angela to write her autobiography when she was in prison. God. That was the only event I was ever so nervous about. I never wanted to meet this person. I had never seen what she looked like. I never wanted to see what the person who wrote *Sula* looked like. To me the feminist Bible is *Sula*. So for me there was no one living that wrote like Toni Morrison. I had never seen her face. I had never . . . I just believed that *Sula* was the best book ever written. So that's how the Toni Morrison event happened. Were you there?

**Reti:** No, unfortunately I missed it.

**Lopez-Flores:** It was a thrill to try to organize and to see how we could introduce Toni Morrison. There were some discussions with Aida Hurtado, and I knew I wanted a little girl who would give her flowers. So it was Aida's niece. And it was with Aida that we conceived of introducing her in different languages. At the time the book was *Jazz*. It was all about language and rhythm. So someone spoke in a Native language. We had Teresia [Teaiwa] from *History of Consciousness* who was from Fiji. Of course we had somebody who spoke Spanish. I remember when Angela went up there to introduce Toni. We couldn't have tape recorders. We couldn't do photography. It had to be on campus, so the largest venue was Classroom Unit II. We also wanted to empower the black community to feel that it was also their event. With Toni, everybody wanted to take part and she attracted students who had not been involved with the Women's Center. We had a reception following the event, and since the receptions were always held at the center, it was both intimate and small (about seventy people) You can imagine how everyone thought they should be included, but preference was given to graduate and undergraduate students and faculty who contributed to social change and diversity.

That's one of the pictures. [points to her wall] It was a small group of people. Events like that always happen as the result of a collaborative relationship. Toni came to Santa Cruz the same year she won the Nobel Prize, months later. We were kind of lucky.

And you know what? This is where the idea of the Blue Ladies was very interesting, because all of these things happened during the time that the Blue Ladies were around. I did fall for having the Blue Ladies look at our calendar and not have events if it was the wrong time. (laughter) I thought of them more as weather ladies, because one of our very first events they didn't want us to have on a certain day because it was going to rain. Then they told us the perfect day, and the perfect day it was raining and raining, but then it cleared by the time our event was going to start at three p.m. And I thought, well, hell. She made a believer of me. (laughter)

### Dolores Huerta and Gloria Steinem



Dolores Huerta, Ciel Benedetto, Gloria Steinem (left to right)  
Photo by Annie Valva. All Rights Reserved.

[The Women's Center] was always about social change. For example, the picture there with Gloria Steinem and Dolores Huerta [on the wall], again, it was knowing some of the nuances of the relationships between women. Angela [Davis] and Toni [Morrison] went

way back. Dolores [Huerta] and Gloria Steinem went way back. So when you had a magical moment such as having Gloria and Dolores on stage at the same time for the first time in years, and during an election year, 1992 . . . It could be magical. Events are about knowing. It was our job to know that there was such a relationship, to have done our homework to find out that in fact . . . I mean, I knew Gloria back in 1972 when she was starting off.

**Reti:** How?

**Lopez-Flores:** Oh, because when I was a freshman at UC Riverside one of my mentors was on the board with Gloria. Gloria was the darling of the media in 1972. She was campaigning for McGovern, and *Ms.* was just being launched. My [faculty] mentor was hosting a meeting for Latinas at the time. [Steinem] was being mobbed by the press. She always made news. [My mentor] had gotten Gloria, when she was passing through San Diego, to have an exclusive meeting with Latinas, because she wanted to recruit women writers for *Ms.* magazine. It was just going to be launched. She was carrying the galleys of the very first *Ms.* magazine. So some of us had been invited. I was one of the youngest. There were three of us who were then in our freshman year. Then we met up again in 1975 at the International Women's Conference in Mexico City. I had been her little bodyguard. Life has different little twists. That's when I found out from Gloria that Dolores had organized her, and that in fact she had participated in the grape-boycott for the farm workers. She had [been with] Robert Kennedy when there was a march in Calexico. Dolores had recruited her and others from the media. So they went way back. So I invited . . . I knew the way to get Gloria to come to Santa Cruz and to lower her fee was by also including Dolores so that it would be a coming together of two people who knew each other from the past. That's why when you see a picture like that, you see the calmness of the folks, and that what they value the most is seeing other people in leadership roles. That was a really wonderful event I think also because of the spirit of

who they were and the opportunity for them to come together and touch bases. See, Gloria was on a major campaign in 1992 to get Carol Moseley-Braun elected as the first African American woman in the Illinois Senate, which she did. She was a one-term senator, but she was the first black, female senator. And these two women were working on her campaign. So it was about relationships. It was about knowing who was influenced by whom. I think that's what made these events so special.

**Reti:** What about the Celebrating Women event?

**Lopez-Flores:** It was Adrienne Rich, Grace Paley, Bettina Aptheker, Sharon Maeda, who was a friend of mine and the first woman of color to head up Pacifica Radio, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Paula Gunn Allen. But again, this event brought people together at a time when our rights and gains were under attack, so instead of agonizing we organized an event; instead of looking at it from a negative perspective, we approached it from a social change, moving forward perspective. Most of our events involved social changers who we listened to and who never just looked back without looking forward.

### **Faculty Mentors**

In all of this, who really played a key intellectual role for me personally were board members and my friends, such as Aida Hurtado and Gwendolyn Mink. Wendy Mink was probably intellectually the most grounded faculty supporter for me and always more serious than most people. Carolyn Clark and Marge [Frantz] were always the most generous spirits. Marge was the bridge with the more established, white faculty. Marge crossed age, color, persuasions, philosophies. Marge was really the soul, I think, of what the Women's Center strived to be. Marge was the most generous heart and soul of the leadership of the Women's Center. I'd say that everyone looked to Marge, including Helene [Moglen]. Everyone turned to Marge to make sure that we were doing things humanely, that we didn't get too intellectual. She was that bridge with the more touchy-

feely parts of the Women's Center, in a way that those of us who claimed not to be, *could* be comfortable with crossing all those bridges. Marge just did it, and she made it possible. Never too Left, (laughter) but always cautioning that we not become too mainstream, or whatever. That was Marge. And Marge always made sure that people felt validated. She could always see the other side. Which is really fascinating, because of all of us Marge was the only one who was truly a communist. Bettina [Aptheker] played a different role. Bettina became a friend and all that, but Bettina was really busy. Bettina was always willing to do what was necessary, but it wasn't necessary to tax her as much, because there was always Marge.

But it wasn't the Women's Center board who made policy changes at the university. It was Wendy Mink. There were differences between Wendy Mink and at the time, perhaps we would say, women's studies. This was all behind the scenes. But Wendy was the person who drafted the sexual harassment policy that influenced the entire UC system. Wendy was a policy wonk. And because of all the connections in D.C., it was a broader, deeper influence for me. Wendy knew the system so well.

Helene [Moglen] understood management deeper than most. She, and Marta Morello-Frosch. I had a personal relationship [with Marta]. I didn't have a close personal relationship with Helene, but I knew I could count on her regarding the center. She was always more intimidating. But it was the Committee on the Status of Women which made the Women's Center even more visible in a mainstream way to the administration. So there were a lot of checks and balances that were going on that allowed my position to be more independent than most other positions within Student Services. The center always had political cover. Helene was the name I would invoke with Student Services. (laughter) Helene always loved playing that role. It was always very clear that different people played different roles for the center, and everybody was comfortable with just calling it what it was. There was never pretense. When the budget cuts came, we knew

[I] was to play the Student Affairs role, at the same time that my colleagues knew that I wasn't really a member of the club. I've always preferred to not be a member of any club anyway.

Lee [Duffus] loved knowing more about what was happening on the larger campus. I took that role very seriously. I mean, I love management anyway. But I really took my role very seriously as knowing what was happening on the campus at various levels, because I saw that as a way of also anticipating what would happen with the Women's Center. The protection of the Women's Center, and the power of the Women's Center was always based on the faculty and the graduate students, primarily.

### **Women in Science**

At the undergraduate level it really was women in the sciences. It's interesting that I'm over here now, because at the Women's Center, invisible to a lot of the more known feminists, was a student group of women in the sciences. They had their own little graduation at the Women's Center. This was a different breed. These were women who knew they were the only ones in their classes, but they didn't talk about it. They were into sports. They were very competitive in sports. And they had their meetings. They were in a different way, feminist, but they were very clear that . . . You know, in Santa Cruz everybody's a feminist. But they just did it. It was wonderful to see that.

I tried, without much success, when I discovered the women in science, to [weave] more of a connection between the humanities or social science students and the women in science, but they didn't speak the same language. I was in love with all those women in science. I saw them epitomizing feminism, because they *were* what we all talked about in general. Most of the people who liked to complain and wanted to change the world spent too much time talking about it. Then I met the women in science, who were just doing it. I marveled at that. It was just different. It was just very different. People like



Karen McNally in earth sciences, a very prominent scientist. She really wanted to be part of the larger feminist community, but they have more limited time in the sciences for socializing. I also felt that people in the humanities and social sciences sometimes have attitudes about women in the sciences and so they hardly ever come together. Not sure why, except that women in the sciences do not understand why the humanities and social scientists do not seek more outside funding for their research, etc. I don't know if it's the intimidation. Now, being on this side with the engineering [school], I do see that we do a lot of politically incorrect things. We take money from corporations, but we use it for our own causes. As long as the humanities and the social sciences do not seek corporate monies, they will continue to get neglected. There's also less money for these endeavors, but I find that it's just a different world. Our board meetings would have driven any scientist crazy. Unfortunately it is a very different world. And it didn't become the priority. There were always other priorities.

### **The Cardiff House**

**Reti:** How would you assess the Cardiff House as a location for the Women's Center?

**Lopez-Flores:** You know, I always loved the location. See, I'm not a complainer. I loved the location. I loved the fact that we were right at the base of campus. We had the best facilities. It was easy for people to get there. We had our own parking. People didn't have to pay for parking. I didn't see anything wrong with being down there. It would have been ideal to have had a satellite office up on campus, but really, for what? I didn't want it to become just another Student Affairs office. I really didn't. I felt that [for] feminists a little extra push of getting out there and having their own space was really a plus. We didn't have a problem with getting people to attend our events. We always had a crowd. I don't believe that it's a problem. I never have believed it. At times we had the discussion, but I always blew it off. I loved it. I didn't have a problem with where it was located. The garden, the facilities were incredible. And then when you had all those ugly

homes that were built around there . . . it wasn't that bad because it created a sense of community.

No, I loved the location! I would say that if you have something to offer, people will come. If you don't, people won't come, and you can use that as an excuse. Sometimes people even stopped by to watch their soaps [operas]. At first it worked for staff . . . You know what, if you want to come and see soaps, come and see soaps. But yeah, I think that for staff [the location] probably would have been more of a problem, but they were never really our target population. I stopped pretending that we were there to serve staff, because the reality was that our programs were never at a time that they could attend. The location was difficult for staff because they only had lunch breaks, so sometimes we would do some things up on campus. But no, I loved the space. What did you think?

**Reti:** I think it's beautiful. I've always thought it is a very special location. The only issue I can see is with access for the community. I do have friends off campus who say, "I can't figure out where it is." It's hard to go on campus at all.

**Lopez-Flores:** Yeah, but you see that in itself . . . There was never a problem with the community because it was easier for them to find it. But you have to have things that they go to to find it. It's not that difficult, especially now with Mapquest.

**Reti:** Yes, and now there's a traffic light, which makes it easier.

### **Other Women's Centers**

So Arlyn [Osborne] was saying that you went to some UC-wide meetings of women's centers.

**Lopez-Flores:** And they drove me crazy. (laughter)

**Reti:** She talked about some of the issues that came up there, particularly around you being the only woman of color who was a director, and the way the two of you raised consciousness about race and the institutionalization of racism and power.

**Lopez-Flores:** I don't know what to say about that. [long pause] I don't know if she was referring to the fact that . . . I think Arlyn and I share an impatience with people just talking about it and doing nothing about it. And never having the vision to go beyond the superficiality of . . . I think once at a meeting people were talking about race and gender. It was like: "Race, Class, and Gender. Race, Class, and Gender." Sometimes, I would do things for mere shock value and to be outrageous. (laughter) For example, I used to say, "You know what? If you were to list the top five writers of this century I bet none would be plain white. They would either be Jewish, black, or they would be Canadians." (laughter) And people would be outraged.

**Reti:** You mean women of color who are Canadians?

**Lopez-Flores:** No, no. I mean that most contemporary writers would not be from the U.S. and if they were, they would be black or Jewish. They would not be plain WASP. Otherwise they are dead. You know? The best thinker in this century, Simone de Beauvoir. She's French. Let's go to Doris Lessing. She's South African. Or Margaret Atwood, who's Canadian. So I go down the list. Why are they having a hard time finding people? I mean, hello? It was a silly thing to do, but it was provocative.

Sometimes there was too much processing, which made us impatient. Arlyn and I discussed quite a bit, but processing race and gender was not a preoccupation because this was a programmatic discussion which came up all the time at the intellectual level at UCSC. Arlyn and I shared a class perspective which meant that race and gender were elements of the whole. Race and gender were hardly issues between us because Arlyn had even a clearer consciousness of class, and when people would try to diminish her

because of her work status, she would have none of it. We were together for so long I'm sure that there were issues, but mostly I remember how solid she was. In fact, the only reason that she didn't get hired for the directorship was because the university and even the feminists can't appreciate a woman moving up the ranks unless she is from elsewhere. When she didn't get the job as director, it was because the hiring committee fell for "the grass is greener someplace else" approach. It was unfortunate for the Women's Center, for when I visited UCSC and the website, the only things on it were the pictures and events from the time that Arlyn and I were there for several years. Being Latina helped me because the woman before me had been white and did not work out.

### **Feminism: Respect for One Another**

I think when we were formed influenced how we viewed feminism. And [in terms of] having a board, the center had the best of all worlds. Because if you allow a board to be strong, what you have is a lot of heads that see the world differently, yet in the same orientation. You have the wisdom . . . I mean, the silly example about the sadomasochism . . . We ended up making the decision that I didn't think would be the outcome. But in the diversity of even the people making the decision there was somebody that was adamantly, personally engaged. We all decided that she must be into sadomasochism, but that was our own perception. The fact of the matter is we had to respect her too. When you have fifteen powerful women, some with very little patience for these issues, but eventually engaging in the laughter, but then having to retract because they find somebody in the audience involved, this is feminism: respect for one another. You think you all think alike, but then you find somebody in the group . . . It's kind of a coming out thing. You assume everybody's the same in the group and then somebody comes out.

It's kind of like what happened with the Blue Ladies. If you remember, one of the Blue Ladies turned out to be a man. If it hadn't been for Simone de Beauvoir, I don't know

how I would have handled the press. But I had on my door: "One is not born, one becomes a woman." And that became my motto for speaking about Roberta. What we were confronted with . . . At first it was like, oh, my God. My reaction, because I cared about this person, was being protective of the other Blue Lady, and at the same time protection for this human being that we had come to love. And as a result, it was like, oh, my God! (There was a lot of humor to it.) Did I ever say anything discriminatory against men? It was just a whole other way of reacting to something that I myself had found so appalling in those days. I mean, anyone changing genders was something that I didn't deal with. I didn't want to hear about it. I couldn't deal with it.

**Reti:** I couldn't either in those days.

**Lopez-Flores:** And then changing. I mean, having a Wendy Chapkis, that's when the Wendy Chapkis's of the world say, "Well, you didn't know this, but there's Sandy, and this person who was a transgender . . ." Those terminologies are now very familiar, but in those days they weren't that familiar. And then having somebody like Dorothy Healy, the gardener. When we told her she said, "That's why Roberta never did dishes! Did you notice she never did dishes?" (laughter)

**Reti:** (laughter)

**Lopez-Flores:** Dorothy would not call herself a feminist, but she loved the center. Dorothy just loved the Women's Center because it was her hang-out. It was unfortunate that after Arlyn left the new director didn't have an appreciation for someone like Dorothy, so Dorothy then asked for a transfer to become a gardener someplace else. Things changed.

There were a lot of very different people that crossed [paths] in the Women's Center [who had] never had any dealings with each other. I mean, here we were all of a sudden discovering that somebody had always been a man passing as a woman. And then

afterwards, when that happened with Roberta, we began to deal with the fact that in many ways they were homeless. They would crash in people's houses, and they imposed. I had had a rule with Arlyn that under no circumstances, no matter what, would we mix work [and] our friendships with them. I remember at one point Arlyn was going to take them in, and I reminded her about that rule that we had made. I had just bought a house. I had this huge three or four bedroom house. [I was] standing in my living room and thinking, my gosh, I should take them in. But then there was that rule. Kathie [Olsen] had said that one of the only rules that we had to maintain with the Blue Ladies, and they understood it, was that under no circumstances would they stay at the Women's Center. If she ever said that they were homeless or they just stayed with people, it never . . . penetrated with us until the end. We trusted that they would lock up, but never stay there. They never broke that rule. It was something that they respected, that rule. That was absolutely not acceptable. Because it was a home, it was in the policies of the Women's Center. It was a hard rule for both Arlyn and me.

**Reti:** Right, no one can spend the night.

**Lopez-Flores:** Right. It was not to become a shelter at all for anybody, for any purpose.

### **What Burnout?**

**Reti:** So how did you deal with this tremendously challenging job? How did you deal with burnout and self-care?

**Lopez-Flores:** You know, that was never an issue for me because I always took good care of myself. I traveled. I took time off. I always took time around Christmas. When I left the Women's Center, I left because after Toni Morrison . . . In the same year that I had Gloria Steinem we had Toni Morrison. We had had the Indigenous California Women's Conference. It was all in 1992. So that whole period was after I had taken six months off. Remember? See, I did it differently. I took six months off. Maybe you could call it

burnout. I don't know. But I negotiated six months off, something that faculty took. All the things I did, I did with a lot of flamboyance. The faculty were happy. Arlyn was competent [to serve as acting director]. We had really strong work study students, like one of my mentees, who I [later] met up with at Harvard. She's got a tenure-track position at UC Davis [now]. She was one of the founders of a civil rights project, because of her work at the Women's Center. She knew how to organize things, and we had empowered her to put in her resume about Toni Morrison, because she really played an important role in that.

When I took off those six months I came back with so much energy. I always have to have a lot of things going on, or I become bored. That to me is burnout. If I'm bored, I can't handle something. But no, I always felt privileged to do the things that I did. I never took a women's studies course. These things I did on my own. I never took ethnic studies. I never did women's studies. I was a straight, traditional field kind of gal who believed that feminism is something that you do . . . I mean, I believe in women's studies, but for me I believed that that was something I did on my own time. And the same thing with race. I've always believed that race is something that I do on my own. I read it on my own. Because when I was developing as an undergraduate, we didn't have women's studies and we didn't have ethnic studies. Well, we were beginning to have ethnic studies, but it was very personal. And I've never been a personal person. I never believed in feminist criticism of Freud without reading Freud. I remember taking a philosophy class and people were trashing Freud. I said, "Well, when the hell are we going to read Freud? Why should I only read the interpretations of Freud?" And then I just thought, this is a silly man. People had made him this . . . I always believed the women's movement's mistake was to make Phyllis Schlafly so famous. When you demonize somebody you get what you pay for.

My intellectual upbringing was more of the Simone de Beauvoir, the French intellectuals who did all of this work for social change. And the Diego Riveras, the Frieda Kahlos, the people who march and protest. But you didn't have to get credit for it!

**Reti:** Academic credit?

**Lopez-Flores:** Yes. So for me there was no burnout. Working long hours for me was . . . But think about it. I didn't have children. I didn't have plants. I only had a dog. No, I got my energy from people. When you have people like Marge Frantz doing this in their spare time, what burnout are you talking about? So for me it was just never . . . I would go to Nicaragua. When I went to Nicaragua, because I was the Women's Center director, I made it a point to meet all the top-notch . . . To meet these people I would never have had such intimacy with . . . I'm still friends with Dolores, with Gloria. You wouldn't have any of this. I mean these people . . . Now they get paid for it, but talk about being tired or burned out. [Dolores Huerta] is in her seventies and what burnout is there?

So for me, it was never a job. It's just like here. To me this is not a job. I'm going with these young people who are brilliant to conferences, giving them scholarships. I mean, hell. Increasing the number of minorities. I'm glad it's a job. But I don't see it as a job. I love it. I love it because it keeps me young. It keeps me . . . It's not real work, in the sense that I don't lift boxes. I don't work in the fields. I do cleaning for fun.

For me it was always about social change. And it was always about keeping myself alert, entertained, intellectually stimulated. I miss that here. Because even though I go to lectures that I don't understand . . . I miss, in fact today at five o'clock I'm missing it. I had wanted to go to hear Judith Butler talk about language. I thought, oh, I'd run into Wendy Brown. The whole time I've been here I haven't seen anybody. I've gone to see Alice Jordan a couple of times but I used to see her more when I worked at Santa Cruz.



It's a different world. I have a beautiful view. I look down at the people there, but I'm over here, with dirty windows. (laughter)

**Reti:** So what made you leave the Women's Center?

**Lopez-Flores:** After Toni [Morrison] I felt a sense of accomplishment, and then it was also the year that I was recruited to administer a Ford Foundation national program housed at UCLA. I was spending time in L.A. and I wanted a change. It was 1994 and there was a change of administration at UCSC. Lee Duffus was retiring. I thought, oh God, who would be replacing Lee? What if I ended up with a mediocre bureaucrat? Lee had been so well informed regarding the Women's Center mission. He was so supportive. I just felt that I needed a change. And then UCLA came knocking. It was a program with a deficit. It seemed to be a time to move on. We had just won the sexual harassment case in 1994 where the university settled with the students at UCSC. The entire experience and what happened before the settlement was truly an experience regarding power and strategy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>In 1994, the San Francisco Regional Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education investigated a complaint of sex discrimination filed by Equal Rights Advocates, representing a group of women staff and students at UC Santa Cruz who had alleged sex discrimination under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The complaint alleged that there had been "severe and pervasive incidents of sexual harassment against students on campus, including several incidents of sexual assault and rape, that the university grievance procedures had not provided a prompt and equitable means of resolving campus complaints about these incidents, and that the university had otherwise generally failed to respond adequately to complaints of sexual harassment." The complaint alleged that these circumstances had created a continuing hostile educational environment for female students. The OCR found that there had indeed been a probable violation of Title IX and its regulations. This was the end result of a two-year investigation by the OCR. Following that finding, UCSC implemented a much stronger sexual harassment policy and educational workshops, hired a Title IX officer (Rita Walker) and made other significant changes on campus. See: "Letter to Karl Pister, Chancellor, University of California, Santa Cruz, from John E. Palomino, Regional Civil Rights Director, Region IX, San Francisco, Office for Civil Rights, United States Department of Education, concerning sexual discrimination at the University of California, Santa Cruz. See also: OCR Case 09-93-2131.

## **Feminism and Power**

Feminism for me has always been about understanding power. Traditional feminists in the tradition of Dolores Huerta, Gloria Steinem, Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, even June Jordan, who was really touchy-feely towards the end, or more so, always talked about speaking to power. Then people started to soften all of that stuff into empowerment, and victimhood, and “we have to work on the self.” I never believed that there was something wrong with women. It was about what was wrong with the system. It is about what is wrong with the environment. I refuse to be a victim in any shape or form. I am who I am. For many of us, sometimes the best thinkers were dead white male writers, as well as women. I never wanted to be closeted about the influence of Don Quixote or Shakespeare. In my old age I’m even becoming more and more enamored with those great, dead white men who were always there in my intellectual formation. Feminism was always about speaking against abuse, injustice, and [for the] pursuit of freedom and equality. It is unfortunate that many women bought in this thing about the psychological damage of women.

I left because I felt that other people could step in to do what I was doing, and that after Toni I could leave on a high note.

I want to [talk some more] about the sexual harassment [policy]. The sexual harassment policy was an illustration for me of how much I had learned from being at the Women’s Center, and how well I did my job. Because you had a chancellor who was principled, respected, and had to do his job, the timing in which we dealt with this issue was right. You had a case that was a gender issue, but it was also racial. And we had been calculating and smart enough to not allow race to come into play. That was a conscious decision that was made by Latinas, and other women of color faculty like Aida Hurtado, Marta Morello-Frosch and Carolyn Clark. It was the women of color who put a stop to having a discussion as if it was about race. The perpetrators were Latinos and the

victims Latinas. But instead of focusing on race we focused on the fact that sexual harassment and rape are about sex/gender. Had it been anything else, we would not have won. Bettina Aptheker saw it. When we approached our white sisters, everyone saw it. Everyone saw what it was really about: sex.

We navigated the waters in a way that we neutralized powerful men in D.C. We had female attorneys. We had the EEOC. We worked with the Equal Rights Advocates in San Francisco. Wendy Mink is a work of art in motion. Wendy is an intellectual of the highest magnitude, and she led the campaign to lead the effort to get to the bottom of what happened. She is one of the most rational beings I have ever met. We all played our different roles. The center was in the middle of it. I had to take my role seriously as an administrator. At the same time, we were advocates for students. At the same time, we had to neutralize staff that was too touchy-feely, that wanted to deal with a lot of emotions that had no place in the changing of policy. But, at the same time they played a magnificent role in supporting the students throughout this ordeal. Everybody had a role. And everybody had enough respect [for each other] even when we fought behind closed doors. We wanted to win, even though we didn't talk this way. Some of us did. Julia Armstrong played a key role in us winning. She could not be demonized. We did not allow each other to be demonized, even though everybody had to do their memos. We didn't talk as if we were friends. But there was always somebody who was a translator. And that role was really Marta Morello-Frosch's, who is still one of my best and dearest friends, because she taught me how to navigate. She had been a dean. She understood the system. And because she's such an educator, she also helped us navigate the waters. And Arlyn played a tremendous role, because Arlyn really believed in balance. Even though I'm going to contradict myself, the whole thing about victimhood—in this case it did have a role. In this case, the whole perception of these young women who had been raped, it was about victims. But see, this victimhood is real.

**Reti:** These women had been victims of a crime.

**Lopez-Flores:** That's right. And Rita Walker was not a sexual harassment officer yet. We created that position, the Title IX position. And why it wasn't going to be housed at the Women's Center was key. Egos had to be put aside, too. It was always about doing the right thing in the long term. We all navigated each other. To me, it was such a triumph that after that I felt it was time for me to leave. How could I top all that had happened during that year?

### **Leaving the Women's Center**

And then more than anything, it was the fact that there were going to be changes at Student Services. I could not conceive . . . It was really a time to move up or move out. So I decided to move out and find a new challenge. Just the idea of reporting to somebody who wouldn't have Lee's depth or ability or management skills, indicated that it was time for me to move on. I didn't know who I would report to, but I knew that Lee was not replaceable. I knew that Student Services did not hire that kind of manager, an MBA from UC Berkeley. [Most managers] spend a lot of time talking about how they're going to manage. Well, Lee had only one rule, and one rule alone, which is what I used with all my employees after that. He only had one fundamental rule for me, and that was he didn't believe in surprises. He was there to support his staff but the only way he could do that was to know. He used to come for a fifteen-minute meeting and we'd meet for an hour. But he came to really enjoy it because I had a lot of updates about what was happening on the campus. I would always hear from faculty, or from Susan [Burcaw], or from different vice chancellors, or different people that were in different circles. Or I would tell him, and he would say, "Bea, that's not right. It's like this." He really enjoyed mentoring. We had a very good relationship. I still see him when I go to Santa Cruz. And it was a lot of fun.

I first took a leave of absence because I was like most people—what if I don't like it? And I didn't like it. The job at UCLA paid a lot more, but it was really easy. I lasted twenty-one months and that's what drove me out of the state and out of the public [sector]. That's when I decided to go to Harvard, and that was a brilliant experience.

Interestingly enough, the way that I ended up being the director for the Graduate Advising Diversity Programs in the College of Engineering at UC Berkeley was because former Chancellor Pister had a lot of respect for the UCSC Women's Center. I didn't know that, but when my name came up and I was appointed interim director, it truly felt as if I won the position because the committee respected Pister's endorsement. He created this position when he was dean of the College of Engineering. He's a real god at UC Berkeley. People think he walks on water, and he does in many ways on diversity.

UC Santa Cruz is different. And he was one of the strongest chancellors there. We gave him a lot of heartache too. It's interesting that over here I haven't heard one person say anything but ooh! ah! about Karl Pister. I had an event for women engineers, to welcome the faculty and students, and he attended. I love this job now because it is about increasing the number of underrepresented students and women. It is a true privilege to work on these issues and to see former Chancellor Pister, who most recently seems to have been key in saving the outreach programs for the UC system. He led the committee that documented the outreach programs' value.

### **Until We Reach Parity: The Future of Women's Centers at UC**

I do miss the Women's Center. I think that what happened at the other UCs and what happened here at Berkeley was a real betrayal of what the women's center is meant to be, and if there had been strong leadership they would not have become this euphemism of nothingness. They're just doing anything that has to do with sexuality. What is it they call themselves? They're no longer a women's center. They are gender equity, or

transgender. They are so very trendy these days you'd think women had reached parity. It is sad that the staff in these centers were not able to fight the administration. Consolidating units means the mission is so broad it means nothing. In Santa Cruz there is still a Women's Center separate from the GLBT something center, right? Does it still have the questioning—Q?<sup>4</sup>

**Reti:** No.

**Lopez-Flores:** No more questioning. (laughter) But you know what, for young people developing, that's important. It's important that they don't have to have a political view. If it's about personal development and identity, then that's what it is. But the Women's Center was supposed to be about something more. It wasn't about identity. It was about gender discrimination. It was about unequal treatment in a place where we pay taxes. It was a lot of things based on economics. And to lose sight of that perspective as feminists, to me is like being a post-modernist feminist that stands for nothing. At an intellectual level they have a right to be. There should be post-modernists, intellectually. But when you're talking about social change, and you're talking about intellectual pursuits, that is one aspect of feminism. That is only one aspect. I think that when people don't have a philosophy, when they don't have a mission, when they don't have a clear vision, if the leadership doesn't know why they exist, there's no reason for them to exist.

The question always was valid: what's the point of a women's center? We always have to pose that question. And there is a time that it becomes irrelevant if you have reached parity. But if you haven't reached parity, then there should always be a reason for a women's center. I'm not sure if people have engaged in that discussion in a long, long time. UCSF no longer has a women's center. They call it something completely different,

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<sup>4</sup>Now called the Lionel Cantú GLBTI Resource Center.

maybe relevant, maybe not. I doubt it. The only places where they *have* fought . . . I know at UC Davis they still have a women's resource center. What you do have there is diversity of staff. Robin [Whitmore] has been there for a long time and she's a very good manager. Santa Barbara, where they did have a women's center, I believe they kept their name.<sup>5</sup>

**Reti:** They do have a women's center.

**Lopez-Flores:** And that center always had the potential to be more. It always served students. It did have a good director. I do remember the staff. They did have the sexual harassment person there under the women's center. Many of us felt that it weakened the position. At UCSC, we learned from everybody else's mistakes, because when we decided to have the Title IX person, it was important that that officer report to a higher level of the administration, and not be in a conflict of interest of it being only for students. Title IX is about affirmative action, so they had to work closely with affirmative action to be the legal arm of the university. Title IX [at UC Santa Barbara] was under the arm of the women's center, and they mostly do programming. UCSB shared their opinions and we learned from them. We learned from all of those mistakes. Being the late-comers has always been a good thing.

**Reti:** Thank you so much, Beatriz.

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<sup>5</sup>UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, and UC Riverside have women's centers. UC Irvine's women's center opened in 1973 and is now called the Center for Women and Men. UC Davis has a Women's Resources and Research Center. UC Berkeley has a Gender Equity Resource Center. UC San Francisco has a Center for Gender Equity.



Arlyn Osborne and Bella Abzug. Photo by Annie Valva. All Rights Reserved.

## Arlyn Osborne

*Arlyn Osborne brought an eclectic background in archaeology, anthropology, writing, electronic technology, and experience with the women's center at the University of Delaware to her position at the Women's Center at UCSC. She was hired in the assistant position in January 1987, and also served as interim director twice during the almost ten years she was at the Women's Center. She left in 1996 to become a Residential Life Coordinator at Kresge College.*

*In reviewing her transcript Arlyn wrote me that she wanted to provide a context for her interview by describing the climate for women at the university, in the workforce, and in society in the 1980s and early 1990s. She asks readers to imagine or remember those times:*

In twenty years, there have been major changes in women's experiences at the university. Today, words like feminism, diversity, multicultural, woman of color, affirmative action



and inclusive may seem outdated or like undesirable labels to many incoming students. But twenty years ago they described situations, alienations, tools, philosophies, and ways to address what we called the advancement of the status of women. Much has changed, I hope, since the early 1980s and 1990s in relation to women's expectations, and representation and diversity on campus. The political awareness and activism that we believed was necessary in the early years of the center was a result of realities at the university at that time. Regardless of academic achievement, qualifications, or background, women were very few to non-existent as students or tenure-track faculty in several of the sciences and boards of study, as upper management or administrative staff, or as grad students completing dissertations in several fields. Many disciplines presented a hostile environment to women ranging from outright ridicule to sexual harassment. For women and men who were not Caucasian or were disabled/differently-abled, the experience was even worse—again, regardless of prior achievement, qualifications, and background. The yearly affirmative action reports of those times reflect this poignantly (especially if the reader understands that women often were counted more than once if they fit more than one category of under-representation) as do *City on a Hill* articles, student research projects, and other documents from that time. Today, I believe, most women don't question their right to go to a university, to study any major they want, to be able to ask or answer questions in a class, to apply to grad school, to feel safe on campus, in class, and to be taken seriously as a student. As students read these perspectives on the history of the UCSC Women's Center, I hope they will also gain some understanding of how important it was to us to open the doors that most of them now walk through without question.

*I conducted three interviews with Arlyn between November 7 and 9, 2004 in my office at McHenry Library, UC Santa Cruz. Osborne's long tenure at the Women's Center and her detailed reflections on those many years, particularly in terms of the multifaceted and complex nature of feminism, resulted in a rich and deep oral history, the lengthiest in this volume.*

*Arlyn retired from UCSC, and now lives in the Sierra foothills, where she works as a data analyst evaluator for a women's center, served a stint as a volunteer firefighter, and is writing a novel. —Irene Reti*

## Early History

**Reti:** Let's start by talking about your early life, Arlyn, where you were born, where you grew up, so we have some context for the interview. What background did you bring to the Women's Center? Who were you when you came?

**Osborne:** I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, grew up in eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey, went to school at the University of Delaware and the University of Pennsylvania, studied anthropology and archaeology, and writing, and other majors—education. I finally graduated with a degree in anthropology. When I graduated, I moved to Arizona on my way to graduate school in Washington State. I never made it to Washington.

**Reti:** (laughter) That sounds like a story.

**Osborne:** It is. There are a few stories there. I stayed in Tucson for a while, and then moved up to Santa Cruz after I had a family. I had one son at that point and was married. That was in 1977 that I moved to Santa Cruz, early 1977.

I brought a lot to the Women's Center, because I had a very varied background. I have to dabble in everything and have some of everything. Before I came to the Women's Center I had done some work in archaeology here with Rob Edwards at the California Archaeological Site Survey, or the Regional Office, they used to call it, at Cabrillo [College]. I had done some ECE [Early Childhood Education] classes over there, done some child care, done. . . Oh dear. There are so many things. I was part of the Quakers for a while, which is how I met Marge Frantz. Actually, for quite a few years when I had small children I was an editor and co-publisher of the *Friendly Woman*, from the Quaker meeting. It was an international Quaker woman's magazine, and it rotated on who would publish and edit it. It came to Santa Cruz for a while, and a couple of women from this meeting published it. So I always had my hand in on editing and writing.

At one point I knew I was going to be a single mom, so I went back to school at Cabrillo and got a degree in electronics technology. A month after I got that I was teaching electronics technology there. (laughter) Did a challenge of my teaching credential for community college. Wonderful people I worked with over there. I was working at Intel as well at the time, doing mask design, calibration technician, whatever, wherever . . . Every time I got hired they told me they were shutting down a facility in  $x$  number of months, so I was always looking for a job, it seemed like. But I loved it there. I stayed there for two and a half years at two different facilities. As one shut down I moved to another, and they finally moved over the hill.

When they moved over the hill, I had been doing a couple of things. One was that I and two other women were the first women to ever teach electronics at Cabrillo. It was a big deal at that time, and we loved it. Carla Stancil and the other instructors were very supportive at Cabrillo. And I did a little work with the women's center over there on women in non-traditional fields, especially technology. At that time it was the beginning of the welfare-to-work type thing. (It wasn't called that then.) So I helped set up a network of women in non-traditional fields to mentor the women in welfare-to-work. When Intel moved that final time (it was at the end of 1986 it was moving), at that point I started looking for another job, because I couldn't afford to go over the hill. It was a lot of overtime. Over here I could manage it with little kids. I still had pretty little ones at that time. And it was so expensive. Getting a new car was just not going to work.

### **Coming to the UCSC Women's Center**

So I started looking for jobs, and I saw an ad for the Women's Center. At that point it looked very clerical. I was a little leery of that. I didn't feel like a clerical person much at all. I had done it in my past, but I didn't feel like one. (laughter) I'd done everything from waitressing to whatever, but I thought I was done with that. And I went ahead. I interviewed for the job. Beatriz [Lopez-Flores] was there. Gini Matute-Bianchi was on

the committee. Christine King. A number of people who were very key at the Women's Center for years. There were some wonderful people at that beginning time. Kathie Olsen was the assistant, or had been the assistant, but she had already moved on. I had worked for Tillie Olsen also for about a year and a half, helping her with her papers and various things, so she could write. Kathie did give me a recommendation, but at that point she was already in Ashland. Ellen Farmer, I think was on that committee. So I met a lot of people.

Beatriz [Lopez-Flores] said that one of the reasons when she interviewed me (and we had never met before) that she really wanted to hire me . . . This is one of her "I like Arlyn because" stories. They gave me this question: what would you do if? It was something like: a woman came into the center in crisis. I had a deadline for a poster. A whole bunch of other things were happening at once. I was behind on things. I had phone calls coming in. Students wanted things. And this woman was in crisis. I hadn't had lunch. What would I do? (laughter) This is real. This is how it is at the university. In fact, it always was. I said, "Well, I think what I'd do is, if she's upset, why don't we go in the kitchen, make some tea? I'll share some lunch with her, and I'll call some people to move some deadlines back, get some students to deliver things to the printing services." Beatriz said, "I wanted you because you took care of yourself and the woman first, and you weren't going to run yourself into the ground." I'm not sure that was really prophetic (laughter) because the Women's Center moved pretty fast in those early days. But that's what Beatriz used to say about hiring me, and why she wanted me.

When they announced that I had been hired, some of what they publicized was that I would bring also the technology and women in non-traditional fields part into the center. That was an important piece. Plus, I was a writer. There was an article in the newspaper right after I was hired, about some of my poetry.

**Reti:** Let me stop you for a second. When did you become a feminist?

**Osborne:** Years before that. I mean, I birthed my first child at home in Tucson. It was a movement in the mid-1970s. I'm not sure I called myself a feminist at the time. No, actually I was involved in the Women's Center at the University of Delaware. Right after it started, I was there in consciousness-raising groups. That was in 1970, 1971, 1972. Somewhere in there. A lot of consciousness-raising back then, is what we called it. I did some of that in Tucson. When I moved to Santa Monica for a little while, I got involved in some groups there. I was involved in bodywork, and learning massage, so there were issues around women and bodywork, men and bodywork. It was all a big movement kind of thing at the time. Joined a co-op when I got to Santa Cruz, so then there were the consensus meetings *ad nauseam*, with women bringing up feminist issues, and men doing all the talking, and talking to the other men and not listening to the women who said things. A lot of stuff like that was going on.

I wasn't a real vocal person at the time, but I did say things. And the Quaker magazine that I wrote for and helped to publish was considered a feminist magazine. There was a movement at that time that we contributed toward and worked toward, which was adding women into the Queries, which are questions you ask yourself to reflect on in silence, and use to spiritually question yourself on various issues deeply. Everything was phrased as *he* and that sort of thing. We started publishing things in the magazine about translations from the original Greek, where a lot of the words, Greek and Hebrew, were not gender specific, for Jonah or others. So we began to do a lot of questioning.

Women Against Rape in Santa Cruz. Early years. I wasn't deeply involved with them. I was never in any of the confrontations that were one of the big things that were piloted in Santa Cruz. And that movie that came out.<sup>1</sup> Boy, did I go to that first viewing of the movie. I was so excited.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Confrontation*, was a 1983 film made by Janet Gellman and written by Anne Irvin and Janet Gellman. It dramatized how a rape survivor and her group of friends nonviolently confronted the rapist where he worked.

What else? I mean, there were a lot of things. I felt I had been a feminist for a long time. And suspected in those years, in the early 1980s, that I was probably also a lesbian. I was questioning my sexuality.

I was a woman who worked in technology, and I would find myself in my mid-thirties sitting in a cubicle with six male engineers all under the age of twenty-five, telling me what to do. I'm doing the work for them, and the schematic translation, and they're directing me. It was always an interesting challenge. The place where I worked in Intel, I had two great women bosses, Anne Baker and Joanne Allen. Joanne was just strides ahead of her time in terms of integrating women into the technology workforce.

**Reti:** I see what you mean by bringing an eclectic background to the Women's Center.

**Osborne:** Yes. Which was good because the job at the Women's Center was kind of a jill of all trades in many ways. It was called the Women's Center Assistant.

**Reti:** So when you applied for it that's what it was called? It was [classified as] a Blank Assistant I title?<sup>2</sup>

**Osborne:** Yes. I believe it was a Blank Assistant I. Then it got re-classed to a II, I think within the first year.

**Reti:** So you arrived at the Women's Center after having been hired by this committee. . .

**Osborne:** January 5, 1987. (laughter) My first day of work.

**Reti:** Now, I understand there had been quite a bit of turmoil right before you were there. The first director left after less than a year.

**Osborne:** I only know about that third-hand. Beatriz knows a lot more. Helene Moglen knows it well.

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<sup>2</sup>A generic classification title for UCSC staff.

## The Vision for the UCSC Women's Center

**Reti:** From what I understand, the original vision for the Women's Center was for it to be an activist center. It was going to be the activist arm; women's studies would be the academic, teaching arm; then there was the [Feminist Studies] FRA, which was the research arm.

**Osborne:** Yes. This was the practical arm. The application of it in the real world. I understand that originally there was a policy board, and then there was also an advisory committee. The advisory committee was where all of the students and women of color were. Or at least that's the way Beatriz described it. There were a lot of diversity issues that came up right off the bat. I don't know what words we should use now, because a lot of people don't view these things the same way now that the backlash about PC [politically correct] has come through and changed what meanings words have, but at that time we called it diversity and multiculturalism and inclusion and all that.

**Reti:** That was in the 1980s.

**Osborne:** There was a bit of a rebellion there, as I understand it, with the women who felt they were the on-the-lines activists, who were on the advisory committee, feeling like they weren't really taken into account. They were trivialized. They gave information. But they wanted . . . Their idea of feminism, as I understand it, was a much more inclusive, active role in decision making and policy making, and they wanted to know why they weren't on the policy board. Why was there a two-tiered system? I'm not sure the first director was the one who set that up either. I don't know how that came to be.

But I know that something Beatriz felt very strongly about, and we worked really hard on, was making sure we had a representative group of people on the board. Because everything we did was . . . we felt feminism was collaborative. At one point Beatriz

handed out an article by Gloria Joseph about the difference between collaboration and alliances. We did a lot of talking in those days about what way we could come together effectively, and talk across what people like Gloria Anzaldúa later defined as borders and boundaries. They weren't really defined that way then. It was more: "you white women and us women of color, and we don't want to be called 'women of color' either." But it became a term that women began to use themselves as well, at the university, in terms of setting up groups. The Women of Color Film Festival, or whatever. . . It was a whole big dialogue going on about language, about how to be inclusive, about, as Audre Lorde said, "using the master's tools to try and dismantle the master's house."<sup>3</sup> It doesn't work real well. So you've got language which has racism and patriarchy and all sorts of things completely embedded in it, and it's how it functions, and then we're trying to talk using that language.

Beatriz brought the bicultural part of that, which softened a lot of those boundaries, and gave people ways to get across them. I think she's very brilliant, especially in terms of bringing people together. I watched some incredible things that she pulled off in those early days before I really understood a lot of what she was doing. We developed a relationship where we worked very collaboratively with each other. She thought out loud. It took me a long time to get used to that. (laughter) And other people too. I think it was very hard, because she'd be going in one direction for a while, and she'd still be thinking and talking with people, and it would evolve and change, what she was going to do. I'd be over here working, thinking I knew where we were going, what we were doing. It had changed in the meantime. And she'd come back with: "Oh, no, no. This is what we we're doing now." I found it disconcerting at first, and then when I understood, when we understood how we were working, it got to be very exciting in terms of bouncing ideas off each other. I learned how she thought. She learned how I thought.

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<sup>3</sup>See "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister/Outsider* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1984).



We'd come up with ideas. We'd go off and think about them, and then come back with: how's this going to affect things? She was a very political person. I'm sure she still is. She trained me in politics, in how to look at the ramifications of choices, the ramifications of word choices, the ramifications of how things are publicized. And Annie Valva, who did a lot of our publicity, and a lot of the work on *City on a Hill*, a lot of our photographs over the years, and later in other ways, still photography even after she was away from *City on a Hill* and doing much more professional, out-there work . . .

**Reti:** She's very gifted.

**Osborne:** Oh, she is. Annie did a lot with Beatriz and me on graphics. So we trained students in how you can say a whole lot with the conjunction of things, with putting pictures next to each other. We did a lot of analysis that way. What went out there. What was being said across campus? How was a new chancellor being introduced? How was his wife being introduced? Things like that. The students got in on it. The dialogue was extraordinary.

Community involvement. Ciel Benedetto and . . . what can I say? What a person. The community was very involved from the very beginning. It was very clear to me when I came to the center that where the board was at that time, and Beatriz, and the students who were involved in the center . . . It was very much about inclusion, about saying that women do not stop at the borders of faculty, at the borders of staff, at the borders of being a student. They don't stop at the edge of campus if we're going to work on women's issues and the advancement of women, look at what the status of women is. And the Committee on the Status of Women worked very closely with the Women's Center for years and years. It was an academic senate committee.

The policy board was always community, faculty, staff, and students. It was hard to keep students, because they would come and go. A Thursday evening commitment can be

very hard for a student who is going through the quarter system, having finals. It was always hard to keep students, and yet we did have some great students over the years, both on the policy board and on the campus. And we had women from South County also. To them it was a tremendous commitment to come all the way up to a policy board meeting. And there was often discussion about that. I noticed you had a question—how did you work with South County?

**Reti:** Yes. How did South County women end up on the policy committee?

**Osborne:** (laughter) Oh, I'm sure Beatriz had a lot to do with it.

**Reti:** She had those connections.

**Osborne:** Yes, a lot of connections. And some of the faculty did too. A lot of what happened at the Women's Center was about connections. Just as it was for men, in what we call the good old boy network. Because you don't get a lot done unless you do make those connections. We worked with women in management, staff groups, community groups, students—on networking, on women in power, on a lot of things. The Women's Center was about empowering women, bringing together the people who can talk about what the current status is, what's going on, and then empowering students to make their own choices, to make change, to see where change can be made, to create things. To get students together with people they thought they could never talk to: Toni Morrison, or Angela Davis, or Judy Grahn. Adrienne Rich being one of our volunteers. Does that blow your mind? What an incredible person she is. So for students to have a chance to interact with these women, work with them in various ways. To bring women's studies together. Any time we brought somebody, the vision was you try to get them into classes, you try to have receptions so that students can actually talk in person. You try to get their expertise in all areas. And we tried to do something in the community if we could. We made sure community women were invited to everything possible, involved

in everything possible. Tried to make sure students were the ones doing introductions, and . . .

**Reti:** So they were empowered and learned how to do that, instead of you getting up knowing already how to do it well, over and over again.

**Osborne:** Exactly. It was about empowerment. Doing the graphics. Doing publicity. It was all about empowerment, and seeing everyone as fully necessary to looking at the status of women and empowering women.

## Programming

**Reti:** Let's talk about some specific programs. Let's start with "Celebrating Women: Twenty Years of Victory."

**Osborne:** I just came across some old paperwork and I was looking at who was in that. I mean, listen to this. Adrienne Rich. Sharon Maeda. Do you know who she is? [She worked with Pacifica Radio.] Lucille Clifton. Gloria Anzaldúa. Grace Paley, and Paula Gunn Allen. What a group of women!<sup>4</sup> When this happened it was the first time the Civic Auditorium had been a sell-out crowd in years. This group of women coming together and talking about what their lives were, what they had tried to do in their lives, what got in their ways, and what empowered them, and about the women's movements. It was a big statement, that it was not one women's movement. There were *movements*. And what that meant to these women.

**Reti:** What year was this?

**Osborne:** 1989. It blew me away that we had this group of women. Now, this was something that Beatriz had carefully planned. And the women on the board at the time had a lot of contacts with these various women. Lucille Clifton was still faculty here.

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<sup>4</sup>Celebrating Women took place February 24-25, 1989.

Paula Gunn Allen, I think was at Berkeley by then. Gloria Anzaldúa was a grad student here and teaching for women's studies at the time. Adrienne Rich lived here and was volunteering for the Women's Center, wonderful as she is. And then people knew people. So I'm sure Adrienne Rich had something to do with getting Grace Paley here. It was looking around and seeing who knew who, and who was going to be in this area, who could we get here? Who was willing to come at a rate the Women's Center could afford? Who could we get to pitch in? People like Adrienne Rich sometimes donated a lot of her time in order to make something happen.

I was trying to think of the different perspectives people brought. It wasn't just that they were chosen because they were big names. They were women who had made change in big ways. Sharon Maeda of Pacifica Radio. She was talking about feminism and the women's movement in getting into broadcasting, in getting into public radio, public media. It was a big deal. Who you interviewed there . . . The choices you make in society determine the future in many ways. For Sharon to get the position she got was already a change. Then you look back and see who you can bring along with you. All these women talked about that. So it's not like you get somewhere, or you break a glass ceiling or something and . . . (I'm not sure we used that term yet at that point. We may have.) But once you make a gain, then you look back at who else . . . Like when I worked for Tillie [Olsen.] Tillie's book *Silences* [is] about how women are only one in twelve of the writers published. That kind of idea. You don't get to be a good writer and then just keep walking. You have to look at how you can also create change. Audre Lorde did a lot of that too when she used to come up for the Women's Voices workshops at UC Santa Cruz. She would say things like that. She was a speaker a couple of times and a workshop leader. Very controversial, as she always was. I loved it.

It was also a time of pulling together women who came from various ethnic or cultural backgrounds, and looking at the movements, the women's movements in that way, and

speaking to that. Not all women had aimed in quite the same direction, because there are cultural differences. There are differences on so many levels, and yet those differences make us rich. And that was a lot of what that discussion was about, the twining of voices at that time, was: we may disagree on certain areas, and yet when you bring us all together, look where women have gone.

Paula Gunn Allen, I remember as being extraordinary. There was also a reception that went on where people got to actually meet and talk with the women who were presenting. We worked our butts off, I know that! Man, we ran . . . I'll never forget. Part of my job was keeping people from going backstage. Boy, was that a tough one! Oh, everyone felt they needed to rub shoulders right then and there. I had to deal with media. It was the first time I had to really hold the media off until it was the right time. Everyone claimed privilege.

Privilege is something we talked a lot about at the Women's Center. What is the privilege that certain people claim? As white women we tend to claim a whole lot more than we're entitled to at times, and that was one of the things that was always brought up, always talked about constantly, was: who is claiming privilege? Who benefits from every decision that's made? Who's going to benefit? And looking at that across the board. University Registration Fee Funding Committee decisions. Decisions from the chancellor on down. How did those relate to women? Who benefits? I mean, the Women's Center in those days was fighting for its existence, over and over again. Not like it did in the first three years, before it got registration fee funding, but then it was constant battles because students were not always feminists, and registration fee committees were often led by students who did not see the value of a women's center, and multicultural centers—the various student groups that represented the non-traditional student, or the underrepresented student.

## Collaboration and Social Change

But we did a lot of that kind of analysis in anything, in the policy board meetings, in any talks that were done by staff, by staff, meaning Beatriz and me, and all the students who volunteered or worked there. Feminist studies met there a lot. It seemed like every time people walked in that house there were discussions about what was going to happen because of pay changes, re-classification of people at the university, who got to be mayor in town. Mardi Wormhoudt was a big part of that Women's Center. Her political astuteness, coupled with Helene's and many of the other . . . Wendy Mink's. The tenured faculty. Aida Hurtado. Women who really had a lot to say about privilege, about how every decision that's made in the country, in the state, in the city, county, local level, governmental level, university level, whatever—how that could affect women, children, underrepresented people. So we often said we were the Women's Center and we were there for men of color.

**Reti:** For men of color?

**Osborne:** How to explain that in a way that makes sense? You can't just work for women without working farther than that. It doesn't work. If you're going to create change, you have to have collaboration. You have to work together. You have to all do it together. Because part of what would happen at that time was . . . and it's part of how patriarchy works and racism works, is whoever's in power (and we all know who that is), but people in power try to get those who have less power to fight among themselves, therefore the blame goes places where it doesn't belong. There're a lot of internalized isms that go along with that. There's a lot of disempowerment that goes along with that. And when decisions are made, they aren't made as globally, because those in power don't want to participate, and don't. When you're looking at a feminist agenda, or working on a feminist level, you need to talk about all of that stuff. You need to lay it out on the table all the time, even if it means major disagreements, even if it takes a whole lot

longer than you want it to take. So we worked a lot with men who were underrepresented at the university or in the community, such as farm workers.

**Reti:** How did you work with farm workers?

**Osborne:** Well, you mentioned one of the events that happened before I came.

**Reti:** The Watsonville Cannery Strike?<sup>5</sup> Yes, that was in 1986, and you started in 1987.

**Osborne:** Right, I didn't come until the beginning of 1987, so that happened earlier. But there was a filmmaker, Jon Silver, who documented that, and national publications documented what went on at that time.<sup>6</sup> If I remember right, Adrienne Rich wrote some things about the farm workers' movement in various magazines, letters to the editor that were very powerful, an analysis of the ways that the movements were discounted at that time, labor movements, especially labor movements that were connected with Chicanos or Latinos.

At that time Beatriz was new, I think. I think she started in September or August of 1986, somewhere in there. So she was there for the fall, and then I started in January. She had already made decisions about where she wanted to go. She had some tough times starting out. She was Chicana, and she was vocal. I think by the spring or second fall, she and Helene were working pretty closely together. I'm trying to think who else . . . Gini Matute-Bianchi was still very key at that time. I'd really have to sit down and look at lists of who was where when, and some of the policy board minutes, and I wouldn't remember a whole lot about what went on along the edges then. We weren't involved in that. But early on Beatriz brought Dolores Huerta to the campus. And always in conjunction with academics, colleges . . . She and Helene very much set the tone for—if

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<sup>5</sup>. Beginning in September 1985 an 18-month long cannery strike took place in Watsonville, California. Mostly Mexicana/Chicana women chained themselves to the factory gates to preserve health benefits. This strike involved 2000 workers and drew support from every major Latino organization in northern California.

<sup>6</sup>. Jon Silver's film is called *Watsonville on Strike*.

you want to make change at the university, you work with tenured faculty, because they can take risks that other faculty cannot. At the time of the Anita Hill hearings, when we did the "Breaking the Silence" [speakout], Wendy Mink was very, very key in doing a lot of that, in bringing out the issues of sexual harassment on campus.

**Reti:** I remember that. She was phenomenal.

**Osborne:** Yes. So there were times when we had undergraduates read things, or graduate students, for associate or assistant professors who still could not be out with what happened, either at other universities or at this university. I know some of the professors they had to deal with are now retired, but sexual harassment is still an issue, we always have to remind ourselves. These were the issues of that time. Women can be marginalized very quickly, and we cooperate with it sometimes. So we would always look at how could we contribute towards marginalizing if we don't watch it right now, or toward undercutting somebody if we don't watch it right now, or disempowering somebody.

For me, the early years I worked at the Women's Center, part of what was so special was that I saw change happen. From the time I started there until later, I saw students coming in who expected things that students coming in ten years before never would have expected at a university, like soccer, sports teams. It didn't happen earlier. Title IX was cut and then reinstated and changes made. It lost its teeth and it gained them back. And some women students, when they got de-funded in women's basketball, took it hard. I'm pretty sure it was basketball. It could have been soccer but I think it was basketball, did a grievance and brought an action against the university. And they got re-funded. I don't know what the real truth is. My understanding of the way the students viewed it was their funding got cut because the men's team needed more funding. But at that time the women's team had a higher standing of NCAA, even though we weren't a competitive school, but even within their club status they had a pretty high standing.



They were a good team, and they were cut. The women's coach was fired or eliminated and the money was given to the men's teams. That was a long-standing battle.

**Reti:** What other kinds of things did students demand that they wouldn't have demanded ten years ago?

**Osborne:** The women students coming in by about 1992, 1993 did not expect to be sexually harassed. They got angry! Which is a very different reaction from being intimidated, scared, going home, changing majors. There was also the case that women brought against the university, the class action lawsuit about sexual harassment and a hostile environment, related to some rape cases and how the university handled it and didn't follow their own policies.<sup>7</sup> The students who were involved in that worked with tenured faculty, worked with community leaders who were very powerful, worked with staff (who had to be careful), to do the lawsuit. It was a real risk for a lot of them to sign that joint complaint. But they did it. And they got change made. Rita Walker has been a wonderful addition to the campus. The Committee on the Status of Women had been pushing for that kind of thing for a long time. Wendy Mink had pushed for it for a *long* time, together with the women's policy board. I mean, nothing was done in isolation then. Because women aren't powerful in isolation. You're powerful if you bring the

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<sup>7</sup>In 1994, the San Francisco Regional Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education investigated a complaint of sex discrimination filed by Equal Rights Advocates, representing a group of women staff and students at UC Santa Cruz who had alleged sex discrimination under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The complaint alleged that there had been "severe and pervasive incidents of sexual harassment against students on campus, including several incidents of sexual assault and rape, that the university grievance procedures had not provided a prompt and equitable means of resolving campus complaints about these incidents, and that the university had otherwise generally failed to respond adequately to complaints of sexual harassment. The complaint alleged that these circumstances had created a continuing hostile educational environment for female students." The OCR found that had indeed been a probable violation of Title IX and its regulations. This was the end result of a two-year investigation by the OCR. Following that finding, UCSC implemented a much stronger sexual harassment policy and educational workshops, hired a Title IX officer (Rita Walker) and made other significant changes on campus. See: "Letter to Karl Pister, Chancellor, University of California, Santa Cruz, from John E. Palomino, Regional Civil Rights Director, Region IX, San Francisco, Office for Civil Rights, United States Department of Education, concerning sexual discrimination at the University of California, Santa Cruz" (Call Number: LD781.S4995U56 1994). See also: OCR Case 09-93-2131.

powerful with you. That's why Helene Moglen was so key. That's why she was probably the only person I can think of who could pull off getting the Women's Center started, and getting Cardiff House.

**Reti:** Absolutely. I don't think anyone else could have pulled that off.

**Osborne:** No. She was what, the first woman dean?

**Reti:** Yes, she was the dean of humanities.

**Osborne:** She knew how power worked, how the power structure worked, and she used it. She used her power, and she used it well and wisely. And it scared the heck out of a lot of people. (laughter) And threatened a lot of men. Yet we also had men who worked very closely with us, like Michael Cowan. There were men on campus who worked very closely with the Women's Center always. Very supportive. Whether it was funding when they were provost . . . You name it. And the women who had those connections, like Carolyn Martin-Shaw (Carolyn Clark then). She was great at bringing people together from a number of constituencies, getting them to discuss issues, getting people to understand what the issues were that were involved in a situation. I'd have to go back and look at the actual list, to see whether she was on the policy board, or the Committee on the Status of Women, but there was such overlap, and such talking and such between there, and down in town, and council members, and Mardi Wormhoudt—everybody. The pooling of the understanding of how things worked, the power issues, blew my mind. In terms of students and staff and everyone else being educated to: how does feminism work in the real world? How can you make it work? If you're really going to live it, what does it take to live it? It's not easy.

**Reti:** It's phenomenal that you're having these long discussions, and you're trying to work this way within the very hierarchical, traditional institution of the University of California. That's quite a challenge. What about the community organizations, like

Women's Crisis Support? How much did you have to do with feminist organizations in town?

**Osborne:** Well, the Women's Health Center. Ciel Benedetto was on the board over and over and over, always, always, always. She would try to take breaks. She would try to resign, and then she'd come back. She is such a politician. She is such a community organizer, and so good at making things happen. So we worked very closely with the Women's Health Center. We worked jointly on projects.

The idea was that women's issues didn't stop at the border of the university; that women students, if they were going to practice feminism, practice women's studies, learn what it's about, put what they're learning to work, they had to cross the boundary of the community and the campus.

### **Teenage Mothers Project**

One of the first things that I remember is the Teenage Mothers Project. Helene always cared deeply about literacy. That was one of the first projects I had anything to do with, and it was more helping type up the budget, and type up the grant proposals, and editing and looking for—have we got what we need in here? Beatriz, Helene and I think Gini Matute-Bianchi was involved in that as well. I can't remember all of the people that . . . That was one of the first big things that I know Beatriz pulled off.

**Reti:** And that was a project that focused on literacy for teenage mothers?

**Osborne:** Yes, for a long time girls in high school who had children just had to leave school. So the idea is how do you keep them in school, and keep them learning? This Teenage Mothers Project, if I remember right, happened in Santa Cruz and in Watsonville. There were a couple of them that happened over the years. The first one I believe may have been in Watsonville. Then there was one at Santa Cruz High. So there

was applying for a grant, and that's a lot of the work the Women's Center did, helping students, helping anyone write grants, know how to do it. That's a lot of what I spent time doing and Beatriz spent time doing, was working with people on where do you go for funding? How do you write the grant? How do you know it's a good grant? How do you do a budget for it? How do you combine resources? Empowering women's grassroots organizations.

**Reti:** So did the actual literacy work take place at the Women's Center?

**Osborne:** No. It was done at the schools. The students got to bring their children in strollers, and they had a classroom. It was set up as a program, so they could continue and finish high school and have their children there. That was pretty groundbreaking in many places at that time, as I remember it. I don't remember if it was the first teenage mother's program, but it was an early one. There was still quite a stigma of a girl being unmarried and having a baby.

That was a lot of the feminist movement too. Could women have children, and a career, an education, let alone, could a lesbian have children? (laughter) I remember lesbians coming in, radical feminists, whatever. I mean, there are so many women's movements, so many feminist movements. I remember sitting in the kitchen with a woman who will remain nameless, who is probably still in the community somewhere, who was asking me about who I was. I was still pretty new at the Women's Center. She looked at me and she said, "Well, if you're a feminist and you're going to work here you need to get rid of your sons. You can't be a feminist and have sons." I said, "Yeah? I think a feminist raising sons is one of the best ways to create change." Well, she differed very strongly, felt very strongly that male and female needed to be separate. That's what I mean. There was no one women's movement. There was no single feminist movement. There was no single lesbian, or bisexual, or transgender or whatever movement. There were cultural differences. There were international differences, depending on what country and what

province in a country, what town. You name it. Feminism—the idea of basic equalities, basic human rights, the ability to be empowered, to be in control and make choices in their lives—this kind of idea crossed a lot of borders and boundaries and fired up a lot of people. Women from WILPF [Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom] were very involved in the Women’s Center, from the early days, and of course Marge [Frantz] and Jacquelyn Marie being both from WILPF and on our policy board for years and years and years, had a lot to do with that.

(sigh) Ask me another question. I can get lost in all of this.

### **Controversy and Dialogue**

**Reti:** Okay, I’ll throw a hot potato out there. The controversy over the sex wars, over pornography and prostitution.

**Osborne:** (laughter) Oh, that was fun!

**Reti:** There was so much going on during that period.

**Osborne:** We delighted in it. It’s like, can you have a feminist movement and leave out some women? And good old Wendy Chapkis. She had guts. I’m sure she still does. Marge Frantz had a niece who was a sex worker, who was an erotic dancer. So we sat there in the policy board talking about: what about prostitutes? Well, let me tell you. This was a heated discussion. I mean, we had Gillian Greensite; we had Marge Frantz. I’m trying to remember who all was on the board at that time. But I remember Gillian Greensite had some very strong feelings, compared with where other people were coming from. Gillian was herself a groundbreaking feminist. The rape crisis prevention program here was the model for many, many places. That didn’t mean that feminists all agreed with the way to do things. I’m trying to remember all of the things that she

disagreed on, but I'm pretty sure it was some of the sex worker stuff. I may be [remembering] wrong.

There were some hot discussions. Could we bring prostitutes to campus and have them talk? What would that mean? Well, yes we did, we brought prostitutes to campus.<sup>8</sup> I spent half of my day at the Women's Center answering calls of men who called up here asking if they could have appointments with them! It blew my mind! Well, then of course there was reaction from the administration, because they were getting phone calls. There were people calling the chancellor's office. "How dare you?" The controversy was in the newspaper. We loved it! Women *are* controversial. And what we used to say at the time was, you need to get people talking about it. What women do, and the choices women make should not be under the rug or hidden. We need to talk about it, and talk about the issues here, and talk about feminism.

I think there were a lot of people who were highly educated by those sessions. There were the prostitutes who came. There were erotic dancers. Later Susie Bright came. But having the dialogue there for people to hear prostitutes talk about: "Well, I'm actually a student at Berkeley and I'm trying to get through. I'm a single parent. I'm trying to find a way to make ends meet. I'm a graduate student. Actually, I'm a doctoral candidate. Actually, I believe it's an honorable profession . . ." Who are prostitutes, and why [they become prostitutes.] Remember COYOTE [Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics]?<sup>9</sup>

It was mind blowing and mind expanding. And that's what a university is, as we saw it. That's what feminism is. It's not there to put people in little boxes and say: you stay here. It's what empowers you. How do you make choices in your life? How do you not get restricted and marginalized by society, and if you are, let's talk about it. What about the

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<sup>8</sup> This event, called "The Politics of Sexual Entertainment" included Daisy Anarchy (erotic dancer) and Nina Hartley (erotic film star) and took place on February 9, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) was founded by Margo St. James in 1973 to work for the repeal of the prostitution laws and an end to the stigma associated with sexual work.

social and work issues involved? Why were women resorting to prostitution in order to get through school? What were the funding issues there? All of these issues had to get brought up. And Wendy Chapkis was great at bringing it up.

The newspapers often only covered the sensational part: "Prostitutes at UCSC!" We all knew it would happen. The newspapers concentrated on the sensationalism. But I'm trying to remember if Rose Dean was still at *City on a Hill*, and then she was in town at *Good Times*. Rose Dean was a student on campus, and a brilliant writer. She often was who we would go to, who Beatriz would go to. Annie [Valva] knew her from *City on a Hill*. She would do a really good article. I think she later went on to be a newscaster at television stations. She may still be around in the Monterey area doing TV. *City on a Hill* was winning awards at that time for a lot of their work. And Beatriz would work with Rose and other writers there and feed them information. They would then do what I would consider real investigative journalism. They wouldn't just take a story and go for what would get people reading it. It was, what are the hard questions that this brings up? Some of the articles that got archived about what was talked about in those sessions are fascinating. And the questions that came up always led to: what is a university about? Can a university be restricted by its funders? How do you represent the people of the state? How do you serve the people of the state? What is a university for? Who has the power? Why? How will they use the power? Are they using it to stop people? What happens when a student can only afford to be a graduate student at one of the UCs by being a prostitute? In her mind that was the only way that she could make enough in a few hours to have time to study and take care of her children. What does that mean? What does that mean that you're an erotic dancer because . . . you also have a Master's degree, or a doctorate? What does that mean? And what if you are a woman who had been a heroin addict or something, and then you went into this field, and then AIDS comes along? All the women had to deal with that issue.

People often talk about prostitutes as being black, or poor, or runaways, or whatever. So it brought up issues of what is a black woman's sexuality? Can she ever own that, given what's happened in this country? Some of that came up in articles, the good articles. Some of that discussion had to happen. What is the history of women who had been slaves and their sexuality was owned? And what has changed? Has anything changed? Can they ever really own sexuality? Not just, can you make choices in your life, but where are your choices still—by the media, by the power structures, by everything—where are the choices still being taken away? I'm not claiming to be an expert in that. I'm saying that those are some of the questions that came up, and that had to be brought up by these kinds of presentations, and that Wendy Chapkis managed to find ways of bringing up in her introductions. The way you introduce somebody is very critical, and the way you talk about what the project is about. I remember Wendy being a person of few words, but also very to the point.

I'm pretty sure we had to get tenured faculty involved in that as well, as a protection. Because, boy, the Registration Fee Committee was not happy with some of that! (laughter) But this was a graduate student (Wendy Chapkis) doing her dissertation. So, it's okay for her to do her dissertation, but it's not okay to have a forum on campus to talk about these issues? So, you know, what's going on here? Where does dialogue get curtailed at a university? A university is about dialogue, is about the conversation, is about exploring on all levels, knowledge.

**Reti:** This gets at the core of how the Women's Center approached things.

**Osborne:** Oh, yes.

There were other issues. There was a time when there was a Chicana/Latina student group on campus. I don't remember quite what they called themselves. I can't remember if that was Las Mujeres, or it was another group, because there were a number of groups



over the years. But there was a group that met at the Women's Center, and at one point they were going to be talking about their own sexuality. And a male reporter from *City on a Hill* came, and he sat himself down, along with a woman who came with him. He brought a microphone. These women were there to talk to each other. [But] it's a university. We cannot exclude men. However, these women decided that they were unwilling to talk in front of him, because they were talking about very personal issues. And this guy was claiming entitlement. He came in fighting and angry already, without anything having been said. He came in determined to hear what was going on, as if he had already been excluded, which put a few backs up. But the women were very smart about it.

This is what I mean by women working together. What they did was (and I was there), what they did was they said, "If you'll excuse us for just a minute, we need to talk about what we're going to do here." So some of them went in the back and they talked. And they decided that they could sit there for as long as it took, but they didn't have to say anything. Because under Title IX there are times when there are issues that can be gender-specific discussions, and can be exclusive. We had talked with this guy about this ahead of time, because he had already brought up this, "I need to come to this." We said, "Well, we would prefer you didn't." We didn't say, "You can't." And we explained why. He was unwilling to listen to that—that this was very personal for the women there, and they that they were willing to talk about their own sexuality with each other, but they were not willing to talk about it with an outsider, and a man, and a white man, and a reporter, and a microphone, and all of that. So they just sat there in silence for a long time. A long time. And he finally just got up and left. To them it was a scary thing to do. They had no idea what he was going to write about them. But at the same time, it was very empowering. "You do not have access to certain things about us, no matter how you feel about us," was one of the things that was said later. "We can control some things about our lives, even if we feel marginalized in a lot of society, even if we feel like it was

a struggle to come to this university, even if we feel being here is always a scary experience." These were some of the things that they expressed. "Even if we don't always feel safe on campus, as women, or as Latinas, or as Chicanas, it is very important to us to have some control over who listens to what we say." And they had it. They took it, you know. And they were within their rights, if you look at Title IX and how it was interpreted at that time, some of the court cases and things. And frankly, no matter what he asserted, you can't make people talk. (laughter)

I'm hoping he learned something from it. We tried to educate him about the issues involved, and about the sensitivity that was important there, about his demanding the privilege to be there, overriding their preferences, and what that meant in terms of privilege. I'm not sure he got it. But I'm hoping on some level, maybe a few years later, he understood. It was kind of the same thing when we did the Indigenous California Women's Conference.<sup>10</sup>

### **Indigenous California Women's Conference**

**Reti:** I wanted to ask you about that.

**Osborne:** Actually this morning I pulled out the flyer, the registration form for it. And one of the things I'm most proud of is that little box in there that said: "This conference is by, for, and about the indigenous women of California, the Native women of California. You don't have to be an Indian. You don't have to be Native American. You don't have to be a woman in order to come. However, we request . . ." And we requested that they let the Native California women be at the center. In other words, that they be what the discussion was, what their needs, what their desires, what they wanted to do—how they wanted to use the conference. A lot of things we ran by Student Affairs first (called Student Services then), to make sure the vice chancellor was going to back us up. We had

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<sup>10</sup> This conference took place February 20-23, 1992.

a very supportive assistant vice chancellor in Lee Duffus. And even before he became assistant vice chancellor he was very supportive.

**Reti:** I've heard that. That's great.

**Osborne:** He was wonderful, very wonderful. But we had to make sure that we were going to be covered with a number of things. I don't think he was the vice chancellor then. I think it was Bruce Moore at that time. But we did do that. We did notify: this is what we are going to do.

The group of students and staff who put this together, I think two or three of them were California Indians. And they said 'Indian.' They didn't say 'Native American.' This is where these words get so messy. Nothing like using the master's language . . . (laughter) Anyway, they were very clear that even though their tribes were from all over, they wanted this to be for the California Indian women. So when it came to planning what the various workshops were, when it came to planning how people would be cared for, or housed, all of that, the California Indian women were involved in all of that. The conference was not about anthropologists being experts on Indians or Native Americans. It was not about people who want to learn the Lakota spirituality in a day or two, or in a weekend, and then practice it and become "a medicine person," or rub shoulders with someone who is a Native American because they somehow are in awe of that. It wasn't about that kind of appropriation. It was about the women taking power over their lives, and talking with each other. To get this many tribes together, to get this many women together, was groundbreaking, and from what we understood, had never happened before. So when some people tried to dominate the conversation in workshops, and to bring up stuff that was more about them than about the California women, we had moderators; we had people working with them. They actually had to sign an agreement on the way in that they would keep the California women at the center. I think there

were only one or two workshops where it became an issue, where people decided that they wanted to talk about their own research, or their own perspective on something.

But some stuff happened there that I think was very groundbreaking. Language things. Some of the women (and men, there were men there, too) [who] came from the work being done in Eureka at Humboldt State University with reclaiming languages, and doing it multi-generationally, exchanged strategies [with other people at the conference]. They exchanged ideas and got connected via the internet in ways that we didn't expect.

What else? The basketweavers of California. Linda Yamane, who did the drawing for us for the poster and conference program. I think there were a lot of Miwuk women who were involved. Anyway, because they were already beginning to meet and talk with each other, from various tribes, [the basketweavers] were very instrumental in bringing more women together. They had sessions of their own.

What else? Dorothy Lopez-Frye, a wonderful woman, and what a stateswoman, an elder—she exuded power—said because the elders came, it was the only time and the very first time that a brush dance was done away from the river. They only did two cycles. They usually do three cycles. It's a healing ritual, a healing dance. They only did two cycles, because it was not a real healing. I don't remember exactly how she phrased it. But that was very powerful. And it was a gift to all of us. It was also a gift that they agreed that Annie Valva could photograph, because that was a no-no in many ways, and that we could videotape it.

**Reti:** The conference was videotaped.

**Osborne:** Parts of it. With permission. We had to make sure there was permission. Because photographs have been used against Native Americans, Indians, for years. They have been another way of appropriation, or they've been sold for money, the photographs, without the permission, or without any benefit back to the people who

were photographed. People have been dressed up to look a certain way, to meet a different cultural perspective's desires.

**Reti:** What was the impetus for this conference? I know that Dale Ann Frye-Sherman was a big part of it.

**Osborne:** There was a little planning committee that started it, and then some students got roped in. The committee was Dale Ann Frye-Sherman, Hinano Campton, myself, June LeGrand. June is not alive anymore. She died not too long after the conference, about a year later, of a heart attack, suddenly, very suddenly. I think she was Cherokee. I wish I could remember. It was a group of women who were all indigenous women, except for me. It was at a time in which I was the interim director, and Beatriz was on leave. When she came back she came smack dab into this thing in full force.

It took on a life of its own, and it became incredibly expensive because the logistics of bringing women from all . . . In many cases Native women are not women who have a lot of money, and they are living very marginally, and they are driving cars that break down on the way here, and they are coming many, many miles and bringing people we weren't expecting to the conference.

So it started out with this little planning group. And Rosemary Cambra from the Muwekma Band of Ohlone Indians, which was at that time working very hard on trying to get status and recognition as a tribe . . .

**Reti:** So did they come to you as the director and say, "We'd like to do this conference. Will you help us?"

**Osborne:** I think Hinano, Dale Ann, and I were sitting around one day talking about: wouldn't it be great if? Wouldn't it be fun if? And then it began to grow. More people began to get involved.<sup>11</sup> We began to look at: would we look at doing some kind of a

conference for all Native American women, or all Indian women? Would we look at just doing it for local women? Well, locally there was a lot of conflict. There's a lot of conflict in Indian country, urban and traditional, and all kinds of things going on. So that was an education for me on a lot of levels.

At a couple of points the conference almost didn't happen. There were some administrative decisions about funding that happened, with university administration, like Students Affairs [saying] what was and wasn't possible. Beatriz had to say at some point, "Well, this budget is getting out of hand. We didn't get a certain number of grants we wanted for this, so how are we going to make this happen without offending anyone? We may have to stop it right now." I remember sitting on the front porch of the Cardiff House, at the Women's Center, with Dale Ann and RoseMary [Diaz]. Eddie Samson might have been there. The students were getting ready to just walk away. There was so much controversy. We had applied for a grant, and some Native American students who weren't happy with this group of Indian students on campus had blocked it on the funding committee for multicultural grants.

Anyway, there was a lot of controversy about the whole thing from the get-go, and they didn't get a lot of the funding that they had applied for. So the question was, can the Women's Center come up with it, one way or another? This was one of those joint community and campus things that could blow up in our faces, because university money could be used only for the university and for students. Community funds had to be used for the community. And yet the benefit to the campus for this group of women and elders to come together, for people to even have the privilege of listening to what

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<sup>11</sup>. According to the conference program, conference organizers and planners included members of the Indigenous California Women's Council who represented local Ohlone tribes (Rosemary Cambra, June LeGrand, Norma Sanchez, Ann Marie Sayers, and Irene Zwierlen). The UCSC Native American Students Conference Committee included Marty Bates (Yaqui), RoseMary Diaz (Tewa), Edward Samson (Pomo), Dale Ann Frye-Sherman (Yurok/Tolowa), Marlon Sherman (Lakota), Susan Smith (Karuk), Kristen Thomas (Hupa). Michal Kurlaender, Dana Lee McFadden, and Hinano Campton also played important roles, as did UCSC staff member Valerie Jean Chase (Cahuilla).

they were discussing, and hearing these viewpoints, and these ideas, and this kind of collaboration, and this kind of work, and all of that, was tremendous. So [we had to] convince funders that there was a benefit to the university. This wasn't just a hare-brained idea on the Women's Center's part.

I loved that conference. It was one of the high points of my whole time here.

### **Programa Para Las Niñas**

[Leaving that subject for a minute] you asked about Women's Crisis Support, and I would say we did work with them over the years, probably not as closely as with Defensa de Mujeres. It partly depended on who was on the policy board and connections and things, but there was a really tough point in funding in the community, where programs like Defensa de Mujeres were getting second-seat to things like Women's Crisis Support. It was considered a South County-North County issue; it was considered a Latina-Chicana and white women issue on many levels—who was getting services and who wasn't. Mardi Wormhoudt was very instrumental in making sure that funding happened for groups like Defensa de Mujeres, and that Latina and Chicana women got services. It wasn't always understood, the role she played in that. She really looked at where money was spent. And this is some of the education students got, students who were doing community studies internships. Community studies was one of the boards that we worked very closely with, over and over, and co-sponsored . . . co-sponsorship was big, big, big.

**Reti:** So you had students doing field studies at the Women's Center?

**Osborne:** People in community studies often did field studies through the Women's Center, and went to various women's organizations in town. Things like Programa para las Niñas at La Familia Center in Beach Flats. It was one of those things where we were all talking about, again, how do we have students contribute, and the university

contribute to the community, work *with* the community, and benefit students, and benefit faculty, and everybody benefits from what's going on, and from the monies that are community monies and university monies and state funding, and all of this together, and donors' funding? How do you make it all work? The Women's Center was the hub of that, because women's issues don't stop anywhere.

One of the students was talking about doing an after-school program at this organization, and started working with the organization themselves, and kind of did it as a volunteer. It was going to be just after-school care at first. In some ways it had to do with the Chicana Pipeline that later was developed. The idea was to get out into our local communities. Why weren't our local students, who are coming up K-12 and then through the high schools, why weren't the Latina and Chicana students coming to the university? It was so close. One of the issues at that time for a lot of Latinos and Chicanos . . . well, there were a couple of issues but ones that they expressed were, a) My parents don't want me to move far from home—especially women students [and,] b) I need to help support my family. And many, many students . . . when I ended up as a preceptor at Oakes [College], many students sent some of their financial aid home to help their families. I mean, they lived on nothing in order to help their families because that's what you do. Especially students who had grown up with farm worker parents. You help everyone in the family. Beatriz's parents were farm workers, so she completely understood it. The students bonded with her so fast.

Anyway, we had this student who wanted to go into the community and do a program for students who were pre-school, kindergarten, grammar school children, introduce them to the university at a really young age, and also enrich their home life experience, their experience in town. And also maybe lighten the load a little bit for parents who couldn't afford childcare while they were still working. There were a number of issues. So she worked with that organization, and developed Programa para las Niñas, got



some university funding from an Ethnic Student Activities grant, I think is what it was called at the time.<sup>12</sup> Started it with some community funds from the organization. I think she may have gone to some other organizations in town. Pulled together the funding in various ways, and then offered it. It grew over the years. Then other students wanted to be part of it.

### **Cardiff House as a Location for the Women's Center**

There was always this constant stuff about women's safety around the lighting near the Women's Center, around how remote it was. (And I'll talk more about how that location happened, and why it was so critical, and why so many women held onto it for so many years, and are still holding onto it.) But the safety issue was one that was constantly, and is probably still being brought up, I don't know. It certainly was until the time I left the university.

And there were various things. Can the Women's Center get its own bus to get women down there? Can the Women's Center have a bus stop? That finally happened. We had to call for the bus. For a while we had to tell [them] a schedule in advance, and if we changed it, it was a problem. If something ran over in time, the bus would leave. We had to work really hard. We had to work with the transportation people, create allies everywhere who would work with us. We worked with the University Police over and over again, to do a lot of things in order to facilitate women feeling safe coming to the center.

Over and over women coming to the campus, or their parents, would bring up the idea of, what about an escort service? And pretty unanimously, both Gillian [Greensite] and the Women's Center felt that if students really wanted it, they could create it. However, we really wanted to look at the feminist issues involved. Did women need to be

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<sup>12</sup>. This program started in fall 1992.

protected by men (laughter) in order to get to the Women's Center, and what did that say? What did it say about the campus and its accessibility to women? What did it say about women and their empowerment?

So then, the question was, what about a women's escort service? It came up every year, among the students, especially as students were talking about projects they wanted to do. So that was always an issue, and Gillian always had a lot to say about that too, because that's an issue. It's an issue about empowerment. It's an issue about whose problem is rape and who needs to be taking responsibility for it? And can women make themselves feel more vulnerable than they are? How many rapes really happen on campus? How vulnerable *are* you on campus? I used to walk all over the campus at night. I loved it. All by myself. And I was never accosted. I never felt scared. There were times when things would happen on campus, and as always, things like that became really big. Students should not feel unsafe on campus, no matter who they are.

But that was always one of the biggest questions about it. That, and students not finding it, not getting enough students down to the Women's Center. Should we create a satellite center on campus? Should we do this; should we do that? Should we move to the Redwood Building? Should we move to the new Student Center?

**Reti:** I came across some notes on that in the archive. What happened with all that?

**Osborne:** Well. That goes back to why the Women's Center got the building it got. And that goes back to funding, and being marginalized, over and over. The scuttlebutt is that we got the Women's Center as a bone thrown to women who were agitating, and strident voices on campus, and a pain in the butt to a chancellor at the time of the Nancy Stoller (then Nancy Shaw) tenure struggle and lawsuit against the campus. Certain women's issues were not considered worthy of scholarly study. Women in the prisons. Women and HIV. Women who were prostitutes. Women in the sex trades. Women and

work. It just goes on and on. (laughter) Women themselves, in any way, shape, or form, for a long time were not considered worthy of a doctoral dissertation, of that kind of study. Money shouldn't go into it! Time should not go into it. What—You know! It's the old Evans-Pritchard thing with anthropology. "I've been studying people in Africa for this many months and I've learned nothing. There's no one here but women and children. The men are out on a hunt." Okay. That was a mindset for a long time.

There was a lot of fighting about that going on at the time. Nancy Shaw was fighting for her work to be recognized, for her tenure to be recognized for what she considered to be a key issue: women in the prisons. Pam Roby dealt with it all the time with women and work. What is considered an academic topic?

So there was a lawsuit against the university, and at one point in that lawsuit the chancellor offered Helene Moglen and the group that was working with her a women's center, and funding for a period of time. And then the question came up of where. He offered them the Cardiff House and they snapped it up for a number of reasons. Look at where the Women's Center is placed. It's on the edge of campus. It's between the community and the campus. Therefore it is more accessible to community women. They're not going to feel so alienated coming up. For a long time we had control over our own parking. It was not always an "A" lot. It was the Women's Center lot. It was the Cardiff House lot and we were allowed to control the parking. Then the faculty neighbors bought the rights to the view. We had to cut back the parking lot. Then it became an "A" parking lot. And then we had to still negotiate to be able to have it at night without having permits. Then we had to start issuing permits. It was awful. It was a constant struggle. That's what I mean about marginalization. They knew that if the Women's Center were placed in the middle of campus as part of a unit, community women would not feel as comfortable coming. It would not be as accessible. Women really needed to talk about their issues where they could talk freely with each other.

**Reti:** So there's a real advantage to the location.

### **Funding for the Women's Center**

**Osborne:** Also, there's a funding advantage. If you are in your own building, and it's not big enough to add a whole bunch of other units, then when funding gets cut you are less likely to get your whole unit cut, or your location cut. You watch it at the Student Center over and over again, or at the buildings where there are various student groups, especially the ones related to anyone who is marginalized at the university. When there were budget cuts and problems, when the budgets got lumped together, when the space got lumped together, people began losing a lot of it. The budget cuts would hit. And it seemed like they would hit disproportionately always toward women, toward underrepresented people on campus. Whether it's people who are differently-abled, who are lesbian, gay, or transgendered, students who are Chicano, or African American. You name it. Those things would be cut. There was a point just before Shane [Snowdon] was hired [when] one of the proposals was to cut all of the centers and change them into half-time peer advising positions.

**Reti:** Oh, no.

**Osborne:** Yes. Budget cuts are severe, and people have to look at where it is. Wages are often one of the biggest things. Maintenance of facilities is a big cost. The big costs have to be dealt with. And this is where the Women's Center, the way it was set up and its location, all were very critical. Every time we faced a funding cut that we felt was beyond what we could absorb . . . we did absorb quite a few funding cuts, but when we felt . . . and our funding over the years stayed almost exactly the same, for many, many years, or a little less at times. But every time we faced it, then we didn't just silently take it, as women have for many, many years. We had tenured faculty fighting for us. We had the mayor of Santa Cruz fighting for us. We had women of many community

organizations in Santa Cruz, and student groups, writing letters to the chancellor saying, "If you cut this, these are the ramifications it will have. What message are you sending out?" That was kind of the basic tone of each of those letters. They always had specifics for the time, for what was going on politically with the cuts. I would say that many, many times these cuts were often in advance of expected cuts on a state level that did not materialize. So if we had allowed it to happen, the program . . . I think feminist studies went through this a few times. We all would fight for each other. But when things start getting whittled down . . . Once you're whittled down, it is really hard to get back. It's like staff pay. Once it gets cut it doesn't go back, because there's always a need for money.

**Reti:** It never goes back up. Yes, we are in constant budget crisis around here.

**Osborne:** And it always has been. It's a public institution. There we go. Tax dollars. (laughter) And not as many endowments, I think, as the university would ever like. But, yes, when the monies are like that it's always a question. Women are marginalized and will be marginalized over and over again.

And we're not done yet. I'm working at a women's center [now] and I just brought up to some of these women that—just like we used to say at the Women's Center—we're here to work ourselves out of a job. We aren't here to have a job for life. We're here to work ourselves out of a job, every one of us. Women's issues should not be an issue in the future. So we would train students that way.

Lee Duffus was very key at one point in helping us get stable funding. There were three years of temporary funding, and registration fees were yearly. We had to apply yearly, and get funded yearly. It was just a pain. We'd worry every year. We'd start sweating. We had to do a lot of presentations. We had to present our budget, our rationale, our mission. We had to have students presenting, us presenting. It was very, very hard. And

every year we'd have students coming in, and it was usually a male student who was the chair of the registration fee committee, who had no idea about women's issues. Once in a while we had one who did, and it was just an amazing experience, to have a young man come in who had some grounding in what the issues were. But for the most part it was educating students every time about the issues of women, minorities, marginalized people of all kinds, issues—who gets to come to the university and who doesn't? Class issues. You name it. Everything. It all had to come up.

And we had to very carefully, meticulously look at our UC funding and community monies, and fundraise for the community. The community had to pay for the services they got, but we found ways to fundraise so that we could keep a lot of things free for the community, because they did fundraising with us. So the policy board had to include fundraising in the community. All of our activities did, in order to do that. We had people who donated to the center yearly in order to keep the community part open. And like I said, the community part was: that's feminism. It's women. It's making sure the university and the state are benefiting each other, that the university doesn't stop at the borders, and the state doesn't stop at the university's borders. People don't stop. And students with their internships, high school students from the community wanting to do projects up here. Faculty wanting to do research. Research into women in mental institutions. Research into women and child sexual abuse. We had art shows on those issues, along with discussions and panels.

Women were always the first thing cut. Minorities were always the first thing cut. Anything relating to us. Anything relating to students, which was very interesting. At one point we had Susan Burcaw come in, from Student Services at that time, and Women in Management, and give a series of presentations on women and power at the University. What are the priorities of the university? What are the priorities of a state university; what are the priorities of a private university? Who comes first? Where is the

funding? Where does the power lie? Fascinating. Absolutely fascinating. When undergraduates found out where they fit into that picture, they were angry! And yet, that is the reality. So it's the Audre Lorde thing about looking at the whole picture and looking at: we're in the master's world, and we are dealing with the master's tools. How do you dismantle it, or change it?

There were a lot of discussions about that. We are within the university. We also consider ourselves only part of the university. We also have a community component. That was a very powerful stance to take. No one else that I know of was allowed to do that for a long time at the university. I think Nancy Shaw's lawsuit had a lot to do with it. Helene Moglen and her level of power had a lot to do with it. The political astuteness of people on the policy board who were from the community and the campus had a lot to do with it. Students benefited tremendously from that. [An example] would be the art gallery.

## **The Art Gallery**

So let me talk about the art gallery. As the Women's Center assistant, and then I think at some point in there becoming the assistant director—and I'll tell you why I got to be that later. I know you asked about that—I kept looking at the walls of the Women's Center, (they were kind of bare and white), and saying, "You know, we should have exhibits or something." So we had a few little exhibits. We encouraged faculty to put up their art, or whatever, for a little while.

Then Hinano Campton and Lisa Ow came in as re-entry students. They had worked very closely with the women's center at Cabrillo; they were transfer students from there. They were re-entry women. They wanted to make change, and do things, and get involved immediately. Even though they knew they were immediately going to be in upper-division classes, and were going to be working hard and learning the quarter system and all of that, they came to the Women's Center first, before they were fully

enrolled, and said, "We want to be involved. What can we do?" So I ran down what volunteers, what students could do through the Women's Center, work study positions, all of this. I said, "And one of the things we've wanted to do forever is get an art gallery here." Well, Hinano's eyes lit up. And that's when I found out she was an artist, and very excited about that. Now, she was a quiet person at that time. Partly because she was new on campus and partly because . . . she opened up tremendously after the art exhibit called *Never in the Shadows Again*.<sup>13</sup> That was her art exhibit, Asian Pacific Islander women, and *Never in the Shadows Again*. Hinano did a lot at the Women's Center. That, and Nicolette [Czarrunchick] and women's studies were very key to her succeeding at the university and getting through.

She and Lisa Ow got together and decided they wanted to create a gallery. So we all sat down together. They did some grant stuff to various places on campus. I think on the board at that time we had one of the tenured art faculty, Donna Hunter. She was very, very wonderful. I think she was chair of the art board for a while. Anyway, they went out and found funding. Lisa, who was no longer married to George Ow at that time, but had been, went to him for some funding. Lighting was donated by Lisa's current partner so that we would have lighting for art, and it was mainly Hinano and Lisa Ow doing this, their vision. They put together a series of art shows, and they put together the lighting and the gallery exhibit space, and then started planning receptions.

That first year was stunning, absolutely stunning. There's a book about it that should be at the Women's Center, that Hinano Campton and Lisa Ow put together as part of their senior project. It's about starting the art gallery. It's about the shows that went on, and [contains] photographs of the early shows. So there was *Never in the Shadows Again*, which was one of those shows. It was an Asian Pacific Islander show. Do you have any

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<sup>13</sup> This exhibit took place in Spring 1988.



idea how many Asian Pacific Islander women artists there are in this area? It was wonderful; it was just wonderful. A woman came down from Half Moon Bay.

And in those art exhibits what we decided was there should not just be an exhibit of art. There needed to be a personal statement of what the artist felt about being a woman artist: how she got into art; what was important about it; how it was important in her life; what it meant about her future. So every artist had to write a statement, whether they were a student doing a senior show, whether they were a woman from the community, whether it was an art exhibit brought in as the art board and us together doing something collaborative. A faculty member exhibiting. You name it. No matter what. They had to do a statement, because we felt that why women did things, and what barriers they faced, and what struggles they overcame, or just what their hopes and joys were, why they decided to do something—that translated across the borders of disciplines as well.

I can't tell you how many women came in just to read the statements. Students would come in and tell me, "I decided to become an artist. I've done art for years, but I decided to actually make it my major because of the statements I read." In Hinano's show, she talked during her reception about being in the Silicon Valley area with Joe (I forget his Hawaiian name) Campton, her husband, and his colleagues. He was in advertising in the area, had a lot of technology advertising accounts. He would have to invite people to his house to entertain them as part of his business, and they would see her as a servant. They wouldn't talk to her. They assumed she was an Asian woman who served the food. She was an incredible artist. Her art was all over the walls of their house. It was hard for Joe. I mean, Joe would get livid about the whole thing. It was very difficult. So Hinano went to school and claimed an education, claimed herself as an artist, started the art gallery, and realized what she could do. She was a feminist on a very deep level, coming from her own perspective as a Native Hawaiian woman, and a woman who was in a

diaspora. She was not in Hawai'i. So that was another piece of what went into her art, and who she was, and how she talked about it in her statement. Some dancers from a Heiau in San Jose came and danced for her in the Women's Center, doing traditional dances to honor her. We were in tears. All of us were in tears.

Feminism and women becoming empowered bring together things that would never come together otherwise. It brings people together to recognize the threads that cross these borders and these boundaries. That's why Gloria Anzaldúa and her books were so important to me. Because she was able to articulate this. She taught me so much in her writing, and how she approached her studies. I get very emotional about it. I didn't even know her that well personally.<sup>14</sup> You and I would sit and write with her sometimes, but I never claimed to know Gloria that well as a personal friend or anything. Yet I had such respect for her. Everything she did as a grad student/lecturer and as a writer infused my life with so much richness.

**Reti:** Wasn't she on one of the policy boards briefly?

**Osborne:** Yes. She may even have been on the advisory board early on. I think she was probably one of the people who was very vocal about what it meant . . . She also came as part of the Feminist Studies focus groups.

Anyway, there was a mother-daughter show. My mother exhibited for the first time. Pottery and paintings. A lot of women from the community, women from on campus, art instructors, art professors. To hear a mother and a daughter and their perspectives on why they do art. The intergenerational part of it was just stunning.<sup>15</sup>

We did exhibits there. [Faculty members] E.G. Crichton and Elizabeth Stephens (this is while I was interim director) did that rocking chair exhibit on the front porch. *Rocking,*

<sup>14</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa died May 15, 2004 of complications from diabetes. Irene Reti was her housemate and comadre in writing for many years.

<sup>15</sup> The *Mother and Daughter Art Show* took place February 29-March 10, 1988.

*Red Rocking* [in 1995]. They had the idea of doing interactive art. When they put that together they tied in the history of the house, feminism, the women who had been in the Women's Center over the years, women's voices. They put it all into a rocking chair that they burned women's words into, two rocking chairs, and put them on the porch. The chairs rocked. They had motors under the porch. The story was that there had at one time been a ghost in the house. I don't know if that was true. I certainly never experienced one. I do know that one of the Cowell family [members] came back and told me her grandfather had died in this corner of this room. So we had some interesting stories that happened.

The way you viewed the show was from the outside. You would be on the lawn, and you would see these pictures, different pictures, in these two front windows. It's an older building, an old ranch house, and that was the old part of the house too, which was neat. And these chairs are rocking on the porch, and you would hear women's voices saying things like a conversation was happening up there. It was one of the most amazing exhibits. I loved it. They took women's history on campus, words about women and what they wanted in their lives, feminism, hopes and dreams, and put it on these tapes, melded the words together into this conversation of women who may not have been talking to each other otherwise. Then pictures would come and go in the windows.

Unfortunately one night one of us forgot to unplug it. We turned off the slide projector, but forgot to unplug the motor for the rocking chairs and the voice tapes. And a guy came to cut the grass at five in the morning, as he often did. He cut it for a while and then stopped for a minute for a break. He heard voices and he looked up, and there's a rocking chair rocking, and he hears women's voices.

**Reti:** (gasp)

**Osborne:** And that man, as far as I understand, never wanted to cut the grass at the Women's Center ever again! (laughter)

**Reti:** (laughter) That's a great story.

**Osborne:** (laughter) Poor guy.

Dorothy Healy, the groundskeeper, had a lot to do with what the center looked like. She did plantings that were of the period of the house, the stuff that went into making that a very special place for women. Gardens are typically women's things, or have been. Women's lives were incorporated in that building. That was something that made it very special.

We had things like the Wall of Shame. We'd have women's things put up along the halls, paper where people would write things, and when Shane came the students who worked with her expanded it further. We used to put up women's ads all up and down the hall. Aida Hurtado did this powerful talk at the Women's Center on women in the advertisements of *Vogue* over the years, how women of color were portrayed in those ads. That and [the film] *Killing Us Softly*, those kinds of things, turned women students onto: how were women represented over the years? How did society, in so many ways, affect their belief in who they could be, and where, how they had to look, how they had to dress, and act, and say, and think, and all those things. Just amazing. Then they would come in and write on paper on the walls. The Women's Center would put up butcher paper or canvas. Different years we put up canvas, and women drew on it and claimed it as their own space, and did joint messages.

Then there was the AIDS art show. (I forget the name of it, but it's back in the files somewhere.) The photographer, of the *San Jose Mercury News*, who won a big prize for her work on HIV, put up an exhibit of photographs there. I know her photograph of the child who had AIDS and was refused the ability to go to school, Ryan White. Her prize-

winning photograph of him lying on the couch across his mother's lap was there. And this exhibit had the words of the people themselves who were in the photographs, and what it meant to them to have AIDS. These things were up for months, so I worked with them every day. I would come in in the morning, open up and go down the hallway into different rooms, have meetings. Then a student also did a photograph exhibit about this. It was the first time that the words of people who had HIV and AIDS were there. Having an art gallery that was so live that no matter where you were you could not escape the art, and it was feminist art. That was very clear. There were guidelines for the art gallery.

One of the pictures just did me in every day. I would just stand there and cry when I came in, was of a child about two years old who was in a stroller, looking out a screen door. The child had AIDS and had never been outside, had never been touched without gloved hands, had never been held or hugged, had been in that stroller or a crib all the time, was never allowed to play, and was always only watching. Because that was the belief about AIDS at that time, and how HIV could be transmitted. I just can't tell you how many people . . . I mean, that was only one of the pictures. There were people from all walks of life, all ages, all ethnicities, who had HIV and AIDS, in that exhibit, and their words. It would just stop people dead. They would go down the hall trying to get to the bathroom, and they would just stand there stunned by one group of words after another.

We considered this a feminist exhibit, to put it together, to bring up the issue, to co-sponsor bringing the AIDS quilt to campus. This is an issue that women have. It's not just a gay men's issue. It is a gay men's issue, and we felt, that's a feminist issue. At that time we felt that we needed to publicize that it hit all people of all walks of life, and all ages, and all ethnicities, and all sexual orientations. And it had to be talked about because who are the most sexually active people? College students, right? Or at least that age group. And sure enough, by the time I left the university, I think it was age sixteen to twenty-four heterosexual young people of both genders [who experienced] the fastest

rising number of infections. So to us it was a feminist issue that people were being marginalized, that they were silenced, that the effects on women were not being researched. Women who had AIDS—getting doctors to recognize it was absolutely difficult, very difficult. They were told . . . I mean, they had numerous yeast infections. The symptoms were very women-centered. They had yeast infections. They were fatigued. You know where fatigue goes with women.

**Reti:** Right. Like when women have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

**Osborne:** Yes, and try to get that recognized as an actual complex of an illness, a diagnosable illness. They suddenly had allergies. They broke out with rashes. What happened to men and what happened to women were different. What happened to children who had symptoms was different. It was a feminist issue to get this looked at on many levels. And that's what the photographer managed to pull off by having this in the *Mercury*, as well as getting people to recognize what the life impacts were for people with this disease, that no one was immune from it, that funding had to be found to deal with it, that people had to be humanized.

So the art gallery was not just art on the walls. It was all these issues. Art exhibits by women who were institutionalized for mental illness, and then a panel of them talking about how women in certain years, and not that long ago, and sometimes still now, were institutionalized as a way of husbands getting rid of them.<sup>16</sup> And then once they were in the system and on the drugs, they *did* end up mentally ill. Once a woman was institutionalized, anything she did in her life was scrutinized. Any time she got mad . . . Even yelling . . . One woman said, "I only get angry in my car, with the windows rolled up, at night, when it's dark, and when I'm on a country road where no one else is around. Because if I get angry anywhere else, people think I'm mentally ill again, and I immediately get re-institutionalized."

<sup>16</sup> This exhibit was called *Women and Psychiatry* and took place February 28 to March 31, 1994.

Looking at the disparity between what happened to women in institutions and men. What did it mean to be incarcerated? Sexual predation in institutions. The sterilizing of women who were either considered differently-abled mentally, or the old term 'retarded.' The sterilizing of women as soon as they went into a mental institution. The use of electroshock on women, versus on men. These are all women's issues that need to be talked about.

And this is why we said feminism doesn't stop with women. It's men of color, too. The stuff that happened to women, happened to women of color, men of color, anyone who is marginalized, people who were not able . . . You name it. It happened to everybody. So we couldn't say this was just a woman's issue. This cuts across the borders, which made for very powerful coalitions, because when we pulled together funding, when we looked at who could play a part in this, it was looking across that.

So the Women's Center was not just for women. It educated everyone. And we had a lot of male volunteers over the years. They were also feminists and also were very clear about who needed to be up front. Like introducing people, or doing those kinds of things, because what were the roles in society that were allowed for [men and women]?

The art exhibit on childhood sexual abuse. What a powerful exhibit! All these were done in conjunction with community organizations and community groups. And to work in that center for a month, and to have all these groups, and have all these, sometimes academic, sometimes administrative meetings, happen in these rooms, with the art done by women who had been molested as children, raped for years as children, incested. Raped as adults. Students coming in and standing there weeping in front of some of the paintings. We had to set up a lot of work with the counselors on campus, because women's issues . . . You know, when you are marginalized and you don't get a voice, and people don't take you seriously, which has happened to women, especially girl children, when something's happening in the family. Who has the power? Who can say, "No, it's

not happening"? Who can say, "I'll hurt you," or "I'll hurt your mother," or "I'll hurt your brother or your sister if you tell"? It's powerful stuff.

So these women each wrote an artist's statement for their art. Then there was a panel. There were graduate students doing work in these areas. There were faculty doing work in these areas. It was the community and the campus coming together in such a rich way, to educate everyone and exchange information and benefit each other. Because that's what a university is: it's to educate. And yes, the University of California was set up to be the elite education for professors. But if professors are going to do research . . . At least this is the way it was set up. It's changed a lot with professional schools and stuff, but originally. And this is an undergraduate institution.

**Reti:** It's a research university.

**Osborne:** Yes, but this campus had a particular undergraduate focus, among the other UCs, that for years had been voiced as a main focus of the campus. To get undergraduates exposed to this stuff, so that they could start making research decisions. They could start doing research right away, with tenured faculty. They could get connected immediately as frosh. I mean, what a powerful thing for women students!

Sierra Thai-Binh, one of those students who was so incredible at the Women's Center, worked with us for four years. She was the daughter of a journalist from Oakland who went to go live in Cuba. She was raised in Cuba. She was educated in Cuba. Her brother's a doctor in Cuba. I don't know if they're all still there, but she was here and went to school. She had family in Oakland. The educational system in Cuba and the prison system are not often what we hear about, but from what I understand from her, and from Angela Davis's work and other people's work in those areas, there's some pretty amazing stuff being done for women prisoners, for women in education, in Cuba. And Sierra came to her schooling with the idea that from the very beginning she would



take every class she could from a tenured faculty member, from the top researchers. She didn't come in saying, "Okay, I'm here because I have to be and I want to learn something, and I need to get this kind of grade." She came in with the mindset of, "I want to know some things, and here are some things I'm interested in, and this is what I want to know." And then exploring. And trying to go to who she felt would have the most . . . Beatriz was a big one on this. She would lecture students on it constantly. I would talk to students about it. This was very important. It was especially important for marginalized students as they came in. We did a lot of trying to hook up students who were Chicanas, or African American, or Native American, or Asian or Pacific Islander, with faculty members who would work with them. Now, this was also a big issue that we had to tackle all the time, and women on campus had to tackle all the time, was that the faculty members who were of the marginalized groups often did *more* work with students. It affected their tenure progression. It benefited the students. They could see it. It's the idea of, you don't go alone. You bring others along with you. That kind of feminist idea went up against a wall over and over again on a university campus with the idea that you are an individual who will make your mark in the world, and you need to do it alone. You never do it alone.<sup>17</sup>

**Reti:** Yes, and there's the whole question of tenure review, and having to publish.

**Osborne:** Yes, how many excellent faculty have we lost at that point from this campus, who went on to other places? I mean, look at the year we lost all of the Native American faculty. And look what the University of New Mexico gained in that year! For writing? I mean, it's not just like you lose just the faculty. You lost their discipline and their

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<sup>17</sup>. Osborne added the following footnote to the transcript: "Women faculty and grad students were at a disadvantage in the tenure and degree process in a number of ways, and even more so if they spent much of their time focusing on helping undergraduate students succeed at the university. A number of brilliant and accomplished faculty and grad students gave up the hope of tenure or a timely doctorate degree through their mentoring and daily work with undergraduates. I believe UCSC lost too many faculty (both male and female) in the tenure process this way, as well as through other systematic disrespectful processes that did not support what we called 'Faculty of Color' at that time."

approach to it, and their expertise. They went to New Mexico, many of them, and then Berkeley. I mean you . . . Oh! I still just want to spit sometimes with what we lost over the years. Look at losing Lucille Clifton.

**Reti:** Where did she go?

**Osborne:** She went to the East Coast, to the Washington, D.C. area. She was wooed away, and she was wooed away big time. We lost her big time. I mean, what she did with students. The way she got them writing, opening their eyes on issues, on so many levels. When people are marginalized, they don't talk about issues just within the discipline. It's how it affects everything. Which is why Gloria Anzaldúa's work in [editing] *Haciendo Caras* [brought] together those writers. Doing that presentation, that reading was an amazing, amazing thing for everyone at the university, the people in the community who came. Those voices blending together, talking about things, voices who had been marginalized, not allowed to publish, underpublished, told to write about other subjects, the subjects they wrote about marginalized.<sup>18</sup> I mean, you name it. Coming to a university and not being allowed to read writers of their own ethnicity. This has been an ongoing [issue]. There was a lot of talk about who were seminal . . . seminal (laughter) writers.

**Reti:** I hate that word. And seminars. (laughter)

**Osborne:** Yeah! There's a root word there. And who were the canon? Those were things that I heard discussed at the Women's Center again and again, with feminist studies meeting there, with faculty who met there and talked there. Those are issues, again and again, that came up for the university. I really believe the university has only benefited from those kinds of talks, and things that were added in, classes that were created

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<sup>18</sup> *Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1990). The reading sponsored by the Women's Center was held October 26, 1990 at the Kresge Town Hall.

because of the work of Bettina Aptheker or Helene Moglen. All these names. I don't know in three days how we can even mention the powerful affect some of these women [have had.] I mean, Teresia Teaiwa. Do you remember her?

**Reti:** No.

**Osborne:** That's what I mean. These women come through and go on. As I move out into the world and go other places, I hear about these women all over the world. And I'm like, whoa! They went to UCSC. They were at the Women's Center at some point, either as a student, or in feminist studies, or at a conference there, or at a discussion there, or at a panel there, or part of a volunteer group there.

### **Serving UCSC Staff Women**

Staff is often something people don't think about on campus. Funding things for staff was always a very tricky thing at the Women's Center, because there wasn't much funding for staff things on campus. Women staff had a lot of issues, ranging from sexual harassment, to what jobs they could hold, to classifications. You remember the big event Teresa [Ronsse] from the linguistics board did about board assistants? Women would go to the Cardiff House, to the Women's Center, and talk there, because they were far enough from their board of study, far enough from where they were, that they could talk about things. I feel like I can say Teresa's name because this was done all in public. But a lot of issues: undergoing sexual harassment in your job, undergoing discrimination in the workplace, affirmative action issues. We were a resource to get women [connected with] who would make a difference in their lives, to where would be the best place to go, so they didn't have to tell their story two hundred times and finally give up. How can you make it so that when they go somewhere—whether they are students, staff, faculty, a visiting professor, a community woman—that when they go somewhere they are going to be more likely to get whatever the problem is addressed, or listened to, or resolved on

some level? Even though we couldn't fix everything, the idea was it had to be addressed. The women had to be empowered. They couldn't just be shut down and have the door slammed in their face again and again.

So staff women would meet at the center. And the staff women's retreat . . . I'm trying to think of all the women involved in that?

**Reti:** The Women at Work retreat?

**Osborne:** Yes.

**Reti:** That's still going on.

**Osborne:** My first year at the Women's Center I think was the first year of that retreat, and I got to go and present. (laughter) I think I ended up on that committee like *that*, in the very first month here. That was a very empowering thing for staff women.

## **The Status of Women**

The Committee on the Status of Women met [at the Women's Center] often, and could talk about the issues with sexual harassment in a place where they knew they would not be overheard, and their jobs endangered, whatever had to be talked about. And there were men on the Committee on the Status of Women. We're not talking just women here. This is creating alliances and collaboration. If what women have to contribute isn't heard, then we're not representing the people of the state here. We are not getting the full input, the full possibility. When only the canons of certain literatures are taught, you lose the richness of the rest. Gloria Anzaldúa edited *Haciendo Caras*, and brought those women's voices together, and talked about the masks they had to wear in public, versus what was really going on in their lives. The levels that it uncovered were amazing.

Beatriz loved Elena Poniatowska because Elena went in and got women's voices, people's voices, the people who were affected, and let them talk. It's narrative literature, and she was kind of the mother of this kind of literature. She went around and interviewed people after the earthquake and the strikes in Mexico City. This kind of literature was completely scorned in the academy for years and years. This is about the status of women. If women are marginalized, what are we missing in the world? Bringing the Guerilla Girls to campus. Do you remember the Guerilla Girls?

**Reti:** I do remember the Guerilla Girls.

**Osborne:** That was fun! (laughter) And yes, that was done in conjunction with the art board. We co-sponsored so many things so they could happen and get on campus. Because we wanted students and community women exposed to them, exposed to the possibilities.

The Guerilla Girls<sup>19</sup> came about because women were not getting exhibited. Women artists throughout the world were not being exhibited. Men could get into galleries. Men could get funded. Men could get exhibited. Men would get invited to various shows that would get shown in museums. Women artists throughout the years had been marginalized. It's kind of like saying, "Native American literature is not literature. It is folktales." It's that kind of a marginalization. Paula Gunn Allen's introduction to *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*, that book, and Toni Morrison's critique of literature,<sup>20</sup> those

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<sup>19</sup>. The Guerilla Girls have this to say about themselves: "Since 1985 the Guerrilla Girls have been reinventing the 'F' word—feminism. Still going strong in the 21st century, we're a bunch of anonymous females who take the names of dead women artists as pseudonyms and appear in public wearing gorilla masks. In 20 years we have produced over 100 posters, stickers, books, printed projects, and actions that expose sexism and racism in politics, the art world, film and the culture at large. We use humor to convey information, provoke discussion, and show that feminists can be funny. We wear gorilla masks to focus on the issues rather than our personalities. Dubbing ourselves the conscience of culture, we declare ourselves feminist counterparts to the mostly male tradition of anonymous do-gooders like Robin Hood, Batman, and the Lone Ranger. Our work has been passed around the world by kindred spirits who we are proud to have as supporters. The mystery surrounding our identities has attracted attention. We could be anyone; we are everywhere." (<http://www.guerrillagirls.com/>)

two things blow me away in terms of how they analyzed the marginalization within literature. The language carries so much of this. The words that are used to belittle, to marginalize, to make not respected, not worthy of study.

## Women in Science

Women scientists. We had women in science conferences that brought high school girls up to campus to talk with women who were students on campus, with the grad students, with the faculty, with the scientists in the community. Where did they go after they got degrees here? What level of degree did they get? What kind of jobs did they get? What kind of discoveries were done by women? The women that came together for those conferences were really amazing. Adrienne Zihlman. I think she was on the Women's Center board or the Committee on the Status of Women for quite a while. Very, very astute on all of these issues. Alison Galloway. Do you remember when there was the women and evolution conference here, and all of the flak it got on campus? We may have co-sponsored it on some level, but [our involvement] wasn't big. But there was a lot of flak about that. So, women scientists on campus, like marine scientist Mary Silver. Trying to get a woman in the chemistry board. To get women hired in the sciences was a really big deal on campus. A lot of the talk about how to make this happen was at the Women's Center. Women would come together there, and talk about things in a place where they felt safe, and away from the part of the academy that had the power to intrude, or stop, or de-fund, or interrupt the conversation. They could strategize there. They could meet with women from other areas about: how do you make this happen? Or we could have a conference that brought women together in a way that some of these issues could be brought up, and brought to light so that women students could look at them. I mean, you always want the younger women coming up to look at what's happened before. And in some ways it's a two-edged sword to have women now

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<sup>20</sup>. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.)

coming in expecting things that before were not expected. I love it, because they get so angry when they don't get what they expect, or when they get sexually harassed, or when they get refused funding, or when they answer a question, and the man who asked the question then talks to the man next to them, answers him instead of her. I saw it happen in so many meetings. And Mardi Wormhoudt would call people on it like that! Just amazing. And to have students recognize these things going on, especially in the sciences.

One of my favorite things I did as interim director was the women in science conference. That, and the *Rocking, Red Rocking*, and the indigenous women's conference.

### **The Vision Statement and the Policy Board**

**Reti:** Let's talk about the way that the policy board's role was conceived as part of the original vision for the Women's Center, and why it was composed of members from both the university and the community.

**Osborne:** I talked a little bit yesterday about the [issues with the] advisory board. There had been a big change before I got there in how the policy board was composed and functioned. When I got there in January of 1987, the advisory committee, or advisory board (I can't remember what the term was), was no longer in effect. My understanding, from what I heard, and this is where you've got to talk to Bea or Helene Moglen to see what went on, but my understanding was that the advisory board was folded into the policy board, so it was more inclusive, less hierarchical, less exclusive on who actually made policy. Questions apparently had come up originally about was the policy board a fundraising board or not? I think that played into some struggles with the first director, Diane Reeves. My take is that she came in expecting it to be similar to other women's centers and boards that are fundraising boards and things like that. And that may not have been the vision that the original founders had planned. My sense is that she came

in with one picture. They had another picture. And at some point she decided that wasn't going to work, and left. It was a short-term thing.

I was looking back at the vision statement for the Women's Center: "From the very beginning, undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and community organizers worked together to conceive and articulate a program for the Women's Center that serves all members of the constituency."<sup>21</sup> And I must say that every time there was any kind of an uncertainty, we went back to this, over the years that I was there. We gave it to students when they were applying. We gave it to anyone who asked about the center, and what its vision was. This is an incredible document. I mean, if you look at what it aimed to do, it was kind of like the Declaration of Independence. (laughter)

**Reti:** It was very radical.

**Osborne:** Yes. It was different from other women's centers. The aim was not to become just an academic research center, and yet we wanted that to be [part] of what the Women's Center was available for. So that's why the Feminist Studies FRA and women's studies met there. And there was a library, but we didn't want it to be an exhaustive library. We wanted the library [at McHenry Library], the women's studies section that Jacquelyn Marie was [responsible for]. We didn't want to be marginalized so that women's information was [only] in this one little house. Women are a part of the world. Women are a part of what needs research, or of what research topics were, so it should be a part of the main library. Jacquelyn Marie was very key in developing an outstanding women's studies collection, and [worked closely with] the women's studies program. So the Women's Center did not want to become, like many university women's centers did, a library and research center only. And the policy board was very good at this, [at] not letting it become a place where a library was housed, which would then not have

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<sup>21</sup>. See Appendix for the complete text of the first vision statement.



enough funding to become a [real] library, as was needed for the women's studies program. And it could not become a place that was just academic, or just activist, or just one thing or another. The idea was to bring all of that together to share, as I understood it.

The people who created the vision, the founders, looked very carefully at what had happened to these other women's centers over time, since we were one of the last UCs without one, as you read in the original letters. Helene put that out there very clearly to Chancellor Sinsheimer at the time. They looked at how a women's center positioned itself, and then funding-wise, support-wise, from the university, how it could then become marginalized. So they chose a path that would give the center the best chance of survival, given different climates in the state, in the university, in changes of who was in charge, or who determined funding priorities, in terms of weathering changes in feminism and what women's focus was over the years. I'm still struck with how this vision statement was written in a way that it supported undergraduates, community women, the faculty, the research components, staff, everybody, in a way that allowed it to flourish for so many years, and the conversation and dialogue between them. It never allowed any dialogue to be eliminated. That's why I say it's kind of like the Declaration of Independence. It was so well written you can't mess with it. Or the constitution—you can't mess with it.

**Reti:** It's like the Declaration of Interdependence.

**Osborne:** There you go! But not in a way that if one part went off in a different direction for a while that anything would fall apart. It was always there and ready to open up again. We didn't want to lose those links. It was a place for women, no matter who they were, no matter what their belief systems were. A lot of times we had women come in who did not consider themselves feminists. And yet they felt comfortable there. So we had that kind of a situation. It was also a meeting place for groups who had a hard time

finding a meeting place somewhere in the community. So there was the Monterey Bay Women's Alliance that met there. They were an organization of lesbian women who did not want to be out, for professional reasons. So it ran the gamut of women meeting there. Part of the goal and vision was that, and in the policy for who could use the Women's Center as space, was that the groups needed to have a feminist vision, or a feminist component. But feminism is defined very different ways for different people. So it could be as simple as equality in terms of pay, all the way to some very radical visions.

It was about being open, and able to weather change, able to weather funding changes, able to weather attacks in terms of marginalization, in terms of being shut down, in terms of people saying, "Oh, there is no problem. Women don't need special treatment." Which, as I understand it, is probably still going on right now. I certainly hear it out in the [Sierra] foothills: "Why not a men's center?" That was a frequent question. Internally our answer was often, the whole world is a men's center! However, we often encouraged men to get groups, and to look for funding, and look at issues that were important. But we also made it clear it wasn't the Women's Center's role to do that for them. I often sat with male students and gave them ideas, and gave them the same kind of resources we would give to anyone who came wanting a women's group of some kind. Here are the resources on campus. Here's what's in the community. Here's how you can go for funding. But we also were very clear. Is it a woman's job to take care of the men? And that was a feminist issue. Men had access to a lot of resources women didn't have at that time, in the early years. We didn't feel it was our place to fix it for them. They had the power and the access to go do that.

How the board worked. When I came, the policy board advised the director as far as funding issues. They themselves had a lot of connections for funding and stuff. I don't believe . . . you'd have to talk to the board members on how they saw themselves. My impression was they did not see themselves as a fundraising committee. There was a

committee of the policy board that was fundraising. But the board itself, its main focus was not funding. It was more of an overall, what are the policies that should be made to support the Women's Center? Looking at new policies very carefully in terms of how they would affect the vision. It's kind of like looking at the constitution if you're going to do an amendment. Does it make sense to do that? So there was a lot of that kind of discussion that went on. There was a lot of brainstorming.

The policy board was both stable in terms of who was on it, and changed a lot in terms of who was on it. Each time there was change, there was a lot of brainstorming about what should we cover this year? Should we have a [programming] focus at the Women's Center, or should it just be open? For many, many years we chose to have a focus, because women's issues are so broad, and felt so urgent at times. I mean, all you had to do is say something about women and economic issues, and the needs in this community, in the world, in the university, anywhere, were so huge, that sometimes we'd sit there in the board meetings and get completely overwhelmed with how could we possibly make an impact? Then we'd have to come back to, kind of like the vision statement, what can the university offer here? What could be an academic focus that could be provided here? What research is being done? We'd say, "Let's look at women and work this quarter." We looked at it on all these different levels. The brainstorming began to be focused. Women who were on this board were great brainstormers, and believe me, we covered the *world* when the brainstorming happened. Often we were exhausted at that point. How on earth can we make an impact? So then choosing a topic focused it. Okay, who at the university was doing research on women and work? Can we highlight them in some of the talks? What's the research right now? Would that make sense? Who's coming out with a publication? Is there at the library a collection of work? Jacquelyn Marie often would find funding to buy certain [titles], [and would] talk to who was key at the university at that time. What kind of books should we be getting in here? What kind of a display could we do [at the library]? It was an across campus sort

of thing. People would talk at various colleges on women and work. We would look in the community at what were the women's organizations. There were welfare women's organizations that talked about women and work. So bringing them in, so that they joined the dialogue and there were events where their voice would be heard, and students could look at that. What students were doing projects in the community, or somewhere on campus that related to women and wages? Work is big. Wages, childcare, discrimination, glass ceilings. [We were] trying to narrow [the topic] down to what was possible.

**Reti:** In one quarter, comprised of ten weeks.

**Osborne:** (laughter) In one quarter. And yet, those quarters every time were incredibly powerful. Students got . . . and community women, whatever they decided to sample, they got quite a sample of possibilities to think about. You couldn't have someone come in and cover the whole range of topics in a talk, in an hour or two hours. So we were often like—well, we need to do a conference on this. But then if you think about it, a conference takes a lot of money and is exhausting. So what we would do was try to look . . . I mean, all of these things . . . Talk about women going through brainstorming. "Well, then maybe we could do this? Maybe we could do that?" So then we would talk about well then, how in each little program of one hour, or two hours, or whatever, an afternoon somewhere (which costs more money, so we often looked at in one hour), how could we bring up enough information? Who would be the best person to give insight into this area, or this part of what goes on for women and work? I saw it more as, how can you stimulate more discussion? How can you stimulate more research, more excitement among students into looking into things? How can you stimulate stuff in the community where women's groups might come together with a focus for a period of time to get something done that they felt was important? So then bringing together the people who were working on things, and saying, okay, if you're working on this, and

you're working on this, and you're working on this, then . . . This is the kind of strategy that would happen, and why it was so important to have the women on the board from the community as well. If research is going to be done, and then women are going to go out into careers and apply it somehow, and make it applicable to the real world, not just the theoretical, but applicable, how do you do it in a way that ties into what's really existing out there? So you can have a theorist here in a program, and you can have the women who are on the front lines every day facing wage problems or childcare problems, and then bring them together to talk on a panel. It's the Mark Twain thing. The conjunction of putting one thing next to another can say worlds about what are the holes, what are the gaps, what is being taken care of, where can action be taken.

**Reti:** And what kind of alliances could be created that would be long lasting.

**Osborne:** Right. So the policy board meetings were absolutely exhausting. They were in the evening. This kind of mental energy (laughter) was being called for in those meetings.

**Reti:** After a whole day of work.

**Osborne:** After a whole day of work. Once in a while there would be a board retreat, or something where we had a little more energy. But in general, for women to come up with what they came up with, at that time of day, with that level of energy, tells you the kind of people they were. I mean, amazing women! Just amazing. Following a thread into all these different ways.

Now, it wasn't like it all happened in one board meeting. We would get exhausted and feel helpless, and leave, and go home, and then there'd be another meeting. And often in between, and this was what I call the genius of who they chose when they chose Beatriz as the director, she would start getting ideas, start talking with people, start running the ideas through her [brain]. She talked out loud as she thought, "What if we. . . How about

this? How about that? What would you?" She would start talking with people and come up with more ideas. Then we would be talking at the center constantly, and the students would be talking, and a lot of what the board had brought up as possibilities would begin to get distilled. Then Beatriz would come back and meet with the programming committee on, "Okay. What if? What if we take it here? What if we take it there? Here's who is doing this. Here's who's doing that." She did the application, as I saw it, the boiling down, the distilling into, here are some possible things, along with the programming committee. And many of the women on that were great at doing that. People like Marge Frantz, "It seemed to me I heard so-and-so was doing this. So maybe I'll give her a call." It was just that kind of networking that went on. Calling someone in the community like Barbara Garcia. If we're going to deal with this issue . . . Bea would get together and talk about what would be possible. "What do you see? Which agencies are up to this or that?"

**Reti:** Barbara Garcia was the director of Salud Para la Gente.

**Osborne:** Yes. Just looking at people in the community who were as focused . . . Or Ciel [Benedetto]. Ciel was often on either the programming committee, or the board. But even if she wasn't on the programming committee, Bea would talk with her, "What about this? What about that? What do you think?" "Oh, that's been tried. I tell you what. That would fall flat." "Well, what if we tried to do a fundraiser that covered this, and at the same time brought up these [other] issues?"

## **Guerilla Fundraising**

That was the other thing. The funding. Picture zero on the budget books. A little bit of registration fee funding, which had to go for salaries, maintaining the building, all of that stuff, and a little bit of money within that for work study students. We always fought for work study, because we felt that was really important. And then we had to

fundraise for everything else. The community had to pay for itself. And frankly, the community supported a lot of the university stuff. We had to do it that way. Because the university was always facing funding restrictions, funding changes. Now, at the same time, the university, over the years—because of the people who were on the board and fought for the Women’s Center—maintained a level of funding that was critical. I’ve got to give them a lot of credit for that. Because there were times when it looked like what we need is just basic core academics for students. Student Services or Student Affairs, whatever it was called at the time, is more of an adjunct sort of thing. So if things are going to be cut that’s where the cuts are going to be. If you don’t maintain the academics, what is a university? So it was always an interesting dilemma. Beatriz would head into a quarter, or into a year, with a zero programming budget, have to go find the monies, and come back and pull off things like Celebrating Women. Start with a zero budget, go up to \$20,000 in expenditures, and come back to zero afterwards, and make it balance. I mean, this is the way it worked, and probably still works. So we’d go to every board, “Can you co-sponsor?” It’s such a woman’s thing, like your egg money. If I can get fifty dollars here, twenty-five there. Women’s studies was always good for twenty-five bucks for something. (laughter) Their budget was so low.

**Reti:** I remember that because I was working at women’s studies as a secretary at the time and we’d say, “Well, we’ll put in twenty-five.” (laughter)

**Osborne:** Right. “Can you cover the copying on this? Can you make the posters for that? Can you . . .” And yet going together with Kresge, for instance, Marty [Wollesen] always pulled out some kind of beautiful publicity when we worked with him. It blew my mind what he could pull off that looked so professional. I don’t know how his budget worked, where he got it, but he benefited Kresge. He benefited the Women’s Center. He benefited

the whole campus with some of the things that he and Beatriz worked on jointly. He was the activities coordinator at that time.

**Reti:** And each college has a budget for activities, so that's a great alliance.

**Osborne:** But he wouldn't pay for the whole activity, by any means. That was the way it worked, was you use some, you bring in other people, you start combining resources and see what you can build. The board chairs, or program chairs, depending on the time period, would also give a certain amount of money toward something. And deans had a level of funding. Now, a lot of that is changed. See, that's what I mean by the university changed over time on where you could go, and who would have what kind of money. But once you start putting these together, then you start working on any kind of grant you could get, because those you don't have to pay back, usually. You have to then do a lot of work to show where the money went, and justify getting it, because you'd like to get to go get another grant again, and there're a lot of possibilities. So we went to every possible source.

**Reti:** I know at that point at the university the development office was not nearly as powerful as it is now. But was there any institutional support for finding larger donors?

**Osborne:** When we were doing the Indigenous California Women's Conference, I was the interim director and it was a time when the university was looking at: people were going for grants in all directions from all different areas, so it needed to be coordinated by the development arm [so too many grants didn't go to one large funder]. I was applying to the MacArthur Foundation for money for this, because we considered it pretty groundbreaking to bring together so many tribes in a way that had never been done before. Dale Ann and I and some other students wrote a grant, and then I had to hone it, together with one of the development officers. We worked with them. We



worked with them partly also because our donor account moved through that office. It had to come in through that office, and be accounted for because of the non-profit status.

But it seems to me there were other people that we would call now and then, like the people whose focus within that area was for a particular division . . . like humanities or whatever. I think when we went to the sciences, the funding was much easier to come by, because of the amount of donor money that goes into those areas. Humanities was always a tough one. Their funding, and what people contributed to the university, in terms of development, was always harder. Sciences are clear. Businesses can see their future in it. Now in the arts, sometimes there would be times, like when the Baskins were donating money, the art board . . . this is all kind of hearsay because I'm kind of on the other side of it, but there were times when we found that the art board had more money in a certain direction, and would co-sponsor with us, or ask us to co-sponsor in ways that they couldn't in other years. So I remember the ties in terms of working on grants, and running things through them, and making sure that whoever we were applying to was not someone they already had other plans for, so it would conflict. That was in later years.

In the earlier years (laughter) I'd say it was kind of like guerilla funding. You'd go out, and you'd find your funders everywhere you could. Beatriz was always very smart about that though, when she was going to boards and stuff. She would be asking, "What is this going to conflict with? What else have you got going?" And the board chairs were often talking about that kind of thing. Because they knew where they were trying to get funds for various things, for research. And again with Feminist Studies FRA.

I would say for the most part it was like carrying a little purse around and having your egg money, and you just keep putting your quarters in until you have enough money to do what you want to do. Then you do it. You buy your insurance. You do whatever you are going to do with your little egg money, like go to the fair, (laughter) and then you come home and you have to start saving again.

So that was always part of the board discussions, too. There was a fundraising committee and they would give their report, and talk about what they thought was possible. It was always important to think in terms of who would be on the board, who could have expertise in various areas to make this happen, and go on those committees. Who was willing to do it? I would say that the work they did was always in addition to tremendous amounts of time that they put in on other things, so it wasn't like this was all they were doing. But people like Ciel, when she worked on fundraising, she had so many connections, that she could say, "This is worth it. This is not worth it. You'll put in a lot of . . ." We always had to look at how much energy we'd put in for how much return. Would it be worth it? Would it not? Would we end up in a hole? What kind of fundraisers pay and which don't? We had to maximize our university resources and the community resources. So we did at some point really start working on Friends of the Women's Center . . . What else did we call it? There were various terms that we used. People who donated to the Women's Center. For a while we had to put out a newsletter that we mailed out in return for donations. And then we decided it made more sense to make it our quarterly calendar. We started doing a quarterly calendar, so that people would be apprised of what we were doing, what events were coming up.

And you deal with student projects. The students have an idea, and they have a view of how it should go. It may not want to be how the university wants to be represented in the community. That's another thing the policy board had to talk about, and the director role was very critical. For us as staff, whether it was being an assistant, or an assistant

director, or a director, or whatever, we had to really think through: how can we get these women to make their own vision happen, and at the same time not cause a ruckus that the university would then come down on us, and say, "You can never do this again." So that's why we moved the [women's] music festivals to the quarry. It was a much more protected area [than Cardiff House]. People had to look a lot farther if women took their shirts off. We weren't going to be police and say you can't do this or that. Women are dancing and drumming, and playing music. Some excellent musicians came through. We were talking about feminism, not about restrictions, what you can and can't do. So that made it a more controlled environment. Plus it was an amphitheater. It had good seating, bathrooms nearby. It worked. But then we had to find co-sponsorship so that it didn't cost so much to use, because we had to pay to use it and all of that. A student, Karen Andrade, started the music festivals. At that time she was doing a lot of publicity for the center, in terms of flyers and stuff. And that was back before there were computers at the Women's Center, so it meant taking rub-on letters . . . (laughter)

**Reti:** I remember those. (laughter)

**Osborne:** And pasting pictures on flyers. Copy machines had happened, but the text and picture quality was awful. So it was kind of like . . . mostly words, rub-on letters. Trying to get it straight across the lines. (laughter) If you wanted to add anything like lines or borders, there were tape things that you had to press on. Oh, it was intensive. Publicity was not so easy, so when something happened that was really big it had to go through Printing Services, where a graphic designer had to do it, or an artist. Then it had to be broken into color levels [color separations] if you wanted color, and the cost was prohibitive for the Women's Center.

Also, and I love this little story, at the time when I started there, what Kathie Olsen had done in order to save money, as I understood it, because the budget was low, was when they had a reception at the center or something, we had a kitchen there, she would just

cook a turkey and throw in some food, and people would just cook right there. Well, we had to deal with environmental health rules that hadn't really been dealt with to that point. We could call it a potluck, which could get through that kind of issue, but if we were actually serving the people, or if we charged for an event, it became an issue. So we had to get the kitchen . . . That was one of my first jobs, was getting the kitchen inspected for environmental health. Was the refrigerator cold enough? It was a donated refrigerator. Was the oven, was the stove right; were the cleanliness possibilities right? We got passed, which was good. We also made it a practice not to charge for food, because that's a liability issue for the university.

The other thing I found when I came was that the Cardiff House had once a week janitorial service, where every other unit had three times a week or something. When I called and asked about it, it was like, "Well, you know, it's a Women's Center. You'll clean up, right?" And I went, "Uh, oh." I brought it up with Beatriz and we both decided it was time to say, "Wait a minute. Are we a campus unit or not?" Was this a funding issue? Do we have to pay for these services, or were they supposed to be provided to all campus units? And would it affect our status as being able to be somewhat autonomous, as well as being a campus unit? We had to think through all these different levels of it. Finally we went: you know what? This is a woman's issue. Women should not be the ones who have to empty their own trash, clean their own house, wash the floor, make their own turkeys! We should be able to get funding for receptions to buy the food like any other unit on campus. We should be able to have cleaning happen in our house like any other unit. Why should I have to come to work and clean in order to have a functioning unit? So it became, what are the boundaries here between being a community-campus unit, as we saw it at the time, and getting university services? That's where Lee Duffus was great, in terms of talking it through with us, and saying, "Yeah, let's up the coverage." And I think at that time, if I remember right, it meant some additional expense for Student Services. I think it actually came out of their budget for

maintaining the different facilities. So it may have been a way to, in the early years, to not alienate them, or not cause budget stress for that unit.

But we finally got custodial coverage. That was important. And also started looking at why are we making all our own food for receptions? Now, at times, for budget reasons, we would decide to do that. The cheapest things to make are often things like vegetable trays, fruit trays. They feed a lot of people. Once you add cheese it's very expensive. We would sit there and go, "Okay, do we want cheese for this one? This is a big person. We might have to have cheese and crackers this time." If we'd gotten a hundred dollars for a reception, where four different units put in twenty-five dollars each to make this happen, and yet they also then wanted access to this person who was being flown in from somewhere, and we wanted to make it a beautiful reception, how do you do that? I mean, the minimum for a baseline reception was really \$300. So then how do we maximize our money? And even \$300 was kind of base. If you really want to do a nice reception you need a \$1000. If you are doing Toni Morrison you don't want to do a vegetable dip reception.<sup>22</sup> You want to make it nice. And then you want to allow for wine or something, if you are bringing faculty in. Then you have to deal with the liquor permit and who can serve, and who can't, and all of that. So those were all issues that came up all the time.

So, to go back to the story—I refused to make turkeys!

**Reti:** (laughter)

**Osborne:** And I refused to wash the kitchen floor. I mean, yes, anybody or any group using the center should clean up after themselves. That was a very clear policy. We worked on it and took it to the policy board. The policy board worked on it, and then made a policy. If you are going to use the center, or have an event at the center, you need

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<sup>22</sup>. Toni Morrison came on March 13, 1992.

to clean up after yourself. However, there should be basic custodial coverage of the center, just like any other unit, or any other board of study. The art board does receptions all the time, so they also had custodial coverage, so why not the Women's Center? It's a benefit to the university, the people we bring in. So it's that whole discussion that goes on constantly about, if you position yourself here, what are the ramifications? Who benefits? What may happen if you take a stand in this way?

So I came in, and within my first few months refused to make turkeys. I mean, I did it once, but I'm like, wait a minute. And I refused to be the custodian. I said, "I'm coming from industry and a feminist perspective outside of the university. This is a university. This is a feminist area. Why on earth are you not claiming the same custodial care?" Anyway, so Beatriz and I had to have a talk about that when I got there. (laughter)

**Reti:** It's a great story. It illustrates so much.

**Osborne:** Yes, about assumptions. That's the kind of thing, that, especially in the early years, we came up with again and again, is the assumptions that women will do anything, that the Women's Center should be all things to all people. If we wanted it, we go to the women and we'll get it. So we had to fight, and the policy board had to talk over and over again about, what level of services will we provide to the community? And we positioned ourselves as a resource to the community, not as a women's crisis center. [But] women in the community would hear 'women's center' and they would call up. I got some hairy calls, like a woman locked herself in a room, and her husband was pounding on the door, and it was domestic violence. She was scared for her life, and I am in a position where I can not, at that time with the phone system, transfer her to 911, but that's what she needed, or transfer her to a women's crisis center in any way, but trying to talk her through so that she would then immediately pick up the phone and call 911, or call a women's crisis center, knowing that she wouldn't give up. Do you know what I mean? And trying to get her to do it fast, before he broke down the door.

There were some hairy phone calls, because it was a new women's center. People's needs hadn't been met by the women's resources in the community, which were hard to come by, because the funding for women's things was not easy to come by. It was not considered that important. Women and children were not that important at that time. Domestic violence was still a breaking field in many ways. Which was why it was important to have the academy work on it, and the community together to talk about what were the issues. What are the statistics? What is the need that the state needs to then come through on, and funders need to come through on? Until all that stuff comes together, it doesn't happen for women. So that's why we saw it as critical that the researchers and the people on the front lines would come together and share this information, and work on the things that would make change.

As people saw the Women's Center from the community, it was also educating them as to what we were and weren't. The policy board had to really talk through what is it . . . The community would say, we want you to be doing this. Okay. If we started an art gallery could women sell their paintings at the center? What are the funding issues at the university of accepting money on campus for private things? So they couldn't. They could make contacts with people. They could have their card posted and people could call them later. But we couldn't sell things at the center. All those . . . expectations of what was possible. Once we said this is a venue where you can show your art: "Oh my God. I've never been able to get paid for my art. I've never been able to show it before. Can I do this?"

Or, when we brought community women in to do workshops at the center, the question was, can I charge? If we brought in women, we had to really talk with them in advance about what they were doing. We weren't looking for a marketing talk. We were looking for community women who were willing to share enough information. If people wanted to go to them later that was fine, but we were not the place to put a sales pitch. That was

not what we were about. We were about educating women on the possibilities, on the resources, on actual information. So if students were doing papers on childhood sexual abuse and they came to a talk on that, they wouldn't just hear, "Well, I do a lot of this, and I'm trained in this, and you can come to my practice and I'll work with you on this, and this is what it costs." That's not what we were about. So it was educating the community that you get a lot from us. You get exposure as well. And we'll work with you, but we're not there just to be an advertising kind of thing. You had to give as well. This was about women sharing with women.

The question always came up about honorariums for women. If we're paying honorariums, and especially for women of color . . . I mean, it's looking at who are the women who get published? Who are the women who can show? First level is, where are women marginalized? Where can they not do things? At that time, galleries did not bring in women. Publishers did not publish many women. It just went on and on. So then the question became, if we are paying honorariums, why do women get lower honorariums than men, and why do women of color get lower honorariums than white women? We had some heavy-duty discussions [about] how are we going to take a stand where we pay in a way that feels like it honors women, and does not show disparity between women of different ethnicities, or different areas of study? A woman scientist. Does she get a bigger honorarium than a woman in the humanities, or vice versa?

So you have to sit down, and you have to talk it through, and you have to do the rough and tumble and reveal any biases that are inherent in it. This was not something you could just say, "Oh, well the simple solution is . . ." There was no money. So then how do you do it? How do you then fundraise, and if you make a commitment that you're going to pay women in the community to do this, and women from campus to do this, and speakers you bring in, then how do you back it up with money, and then how does it affect how many programs you do every year, given that funding is hard to come by?



Those kinds of things were tough, and they played into who got funded before the Women's Center. Do women get paid? Do men get paid? All that kind of thing. They had always played into that. How do we then not end up playing into the same biases? So we did start paying honorariums, but we always tried to keep it about the same for everybody. There was also the honorarium that becomes a contract. The university had a level of funding where you could pay up to a certain amount, and then after that it had to be a full performance contract and it cost more and all that. We would lay out for them our budget for the whole thing. "What do you feel you [should be paid]?" We had to make it a dialogue.

**Reti:** You were forthcoming about your limitations.

**Osborne:** Oh, yes. We had to be forthcoming. And then we had to try to make it uniform across who was coming, so that there was not bias in it. That was one of the places we went at one point. I don't know where it is now. I don't know how it went later. But while I was there, and especially when I had much to do with the funding, and I did the books for many years there (shudder).

**Reti:** You had to do your own books, too.

**Osborne:** Oh yes.

**Reti:** There was no support from the university?

**Osborne:** Most units did at that time. That was not unusual until there was a scandal on campus about a unit that didn't meet auditing regulations. A unit had been writing their own purchase orders, approving their own purchase orders, and doing their own accounting, and doing their own bookkeeping around it. We had kept a very clear . . . We were very clear we didn't want to be shut down for some bizarre little bookkeeping thing. I was allowed to do a purchase order and sign for it, and then go pick up the

goods, but what I did was always make sure that someone else signed it if I was going to pick it up. We'd make sure Lee Duffus signed it if . . .

**Reti:** I see. So there was a separation of powers.

**Osborne:** Yes. We tried to keep it as best we could, even though the university regulations didn't always say we had to. But it's part of watching your back. If you are a marginalized person or a marginalized unit, you watch your back. You make sure that you're not going to get taken down for something stupid like that, when actually the issue is something else. You know what I mean? Like if someone gets angry about a program, like on prostitutes, we don't want them looking around for something they can get us on, and do it on our bookkeeping.

**Reti:** It's a vulnerable spot.

**Osborne:** That's right. That's part of being . . . That's why you also want to bring activists to a center, because they think about those kinds of things. There are some academics who were smart about all that, like Helene, and others that were less savvy. Their whole thing was research so they were not going to think about this. That was for their board to do, or that was for someone else to do.

**Reti:** You're talking about a certain set of practical . . .

**Osborne:** Skills and understandings that sometimes in the midst of research or something were not what someone was concentrating on, or thinking about. Someone like Ciel would pick it up just like that, "If you're going to do this, you better . . ." (laughter)

**Reti:** Okay. You were talking about having to do so many different things here. I mean, all right, you're not going to cook turkeys.

**Osborne:** (laughter)

**Reti:** You're not cleaning the floor. . .

**Osborne:** You've got to be kidding! I've got to cook a turkey! What? What do they do over there? Next door they don't cook turkeys! (laughter)

**Reti:** You and Beatriz were doing so much. It's just astounding to me. You did this for almost ten years. Let's talk about the question of burnout, or self-care in feminist organizations.

### **The Challenges of Burnout**

**Osborne:** Whoo! What a topic. It was brought up a lot. (sigh) Burnout. There are levels of burnout. There's an intellectual burnout that becomes an issue. There is a time and physical depletion burnout, in terms of everything we were trying to cover. Beatriz and I addressed that between ourselves and our students. And the policy board addressed that in terms of the whole center, numerous times that I remember. It would come to how do we maximize what needs to be done? Because what needed to be done on so many fronts was so huge, when you look at the status of women. So then on the policy board level, [the board] was often strategizing on (as they wore themselves out in meetings), how do we make the most impact without killing ourselves here? Because we need to go on, and we also have other jobs in which we are making an impact. That was where the collaboration was critical, the bringing up the issues and getting the discussion started, rather than fixing everything. That became an issue. That was very important. The sharing of funding. Rather than trying to make us do all the funding and everything all at the same time, it was let's take . . . That's why the egg money was so important, get a little bit from here, a little bit from there. Build it that way and then make it realistic, but maximize the discussion that happens, the excitement around it, so that it will ripple out. That is feminism. It's a grassroots thing in many ways. It started in

many areas with women who wanted to make change of some kind in their community, or trying to right injustices. So if you can get something going at the grassroots level at the same time some research is being done that justifies the demands the grassroots is making, or focuses them in on where they can make change, and what's going to make a difference, that would be important. So that's the intellectual part.

I would say that a huge number of women who were on the policy board were always burned out, or burning out. And yet they kept going. That's why I said yesterday there was something I wanted to bring up about what Marge Frantz said. I remember at one point a lot of people were meeting at the Women's Center about the Iraq war, the first one, and their concerns about it, their concerns about what this meant for women, and for children, for world peace. There were women who did research in various countries and were looking at this as an issue. I think we had someone come and talk, or we had co-sponsored some talks with women's studies, of women who were Muslim, or women who were Baha'i, Middle-Eastern women, on some of the issues in the Middle East. Israeli and Palestinian conflicts. What that meant for the women and children in those areas. That kind of thing.

So there was a lot of discussion about if we go to war, what would the Women's Center do? What stance would we take? What are the politics involved at the university if we take a stance? What would happen at the state level? What can we do? What can't we do? What can we provide? What can't we provide?

There was a march just before the war started. A decision was going to be made the next day [by President George Bush, Sr.] or something. [A rather large group] composed of members of the campus and the community started by Bay Tree [Bookstore] and marched all the way down the hill. We marched all the way down to town, and there was a rally in town. And it stopped traffic all the way down. Well, some of the Women's Center's role that we took on ourselves, because of who was on our board and they were

involved, was not official, but it was like making sure that if there were permits needed we did what we could there. Getting the Campus Police notified. Jan Tepper worked with us closely in many ways about how can we keep this orderly and not become a problem? It wasn't like the Women's Center was in any way in charge, but that's the kind of people who were involved in the Women's Center, that some of the discussion in some of those meetings was: we need to look at those issues, because we don't want this to turn into anything where students are getting arrested, unless they chose to get arrested. You know, women are looking out for everybody, especially the young people. What's going to happen? It wasn't like we were in any way in charge, but the discussions were happening, because there were a lot of activists at the Women's Center who were involved.

So the march happened, and I was walking near Marge Frantz at the time. Not as a representative of the Women's Center, but as an individual person, which is how we often had to deal with deal with this kind of thing, any kind of political stance, being a university employee. I was walking as an individual person, off work hours. And people were saying to Marge, "I don't get it. You have been in so many anti-war things. You've worked so hard. Don't you get tired of doing this? It doesn't really make any difference in the long run. We're going to invade Iraq anyway." And I'll never forget what she said. She said, "You know what? You just do it every day. This is just one more march. You keep making a statement every day. You put one foot in front of the other, and you don't expect it to change immediately, but in the long run, over time, it changes. This is just one more day. You can't pit your whole mental health on whether this makes a difference." Because people were like, "Oh God, we want them to hear us! We really want the government to hear us. We believe this is wrong to do and it will hurt more people than it helps." She just said, "You know what? You take your convictions and you just do one day at a time."

And very much that's what feminism and making changes for women and the status of women was about, as we saw it, in the board meetings and whatever. And that's what the burnout issue is. You're not going to fix it in one day. It's a societal issue. If you're looking at discrimination, and you're looking at any of those issues, it is within the language. It is within the structures of society. It's within the politics; it's within the governmental structures; it's within administrative structures. It's everywhere. It's a systematic thing, and the ways to fix it have to come systematically. You have to look at it that way. And often, what many people had found as activists is that coming right up head-to-head will make a certain kind of change, or bring certain issues to light. But it's not going to make overnight change. It brings resistance, and with resistance then other issues can be brought to light and discussed. Then people can position themselves and look at how to make change in those areas. But you're not going to make change overnight.

Looking at the period from when I started at the Women's Center, change happened in the status of women at the university, in the world, in the community. From my first years in Santa Cruz, or the stuff I did back at the University of Delaware, years ago, in the early seventies, to when I left the Women's Center in 1996, I saw what I considered major changes in people's expectations and attitudes, and in where women were. I saw women in physics or chemistry who at least were *in* the program, and then they might have to deal with sexual harassment, or discrimination within the program, or not being allowed to do certain topics for graduate theses or undergraduate work, or something. Before that, women wouldn't even go into those fields! So I saw big change.

When Marge said things like that, it really helped with the burnout. It was: I can do a program tomorrow. And then I've got to go home and take care of my kids. I can train some students in how to do this, and then I can trust that ripple effect that will go out into the community. We can start a Chicana Pipeline to get local Chicana and Latina

women in high schools, in grammar schools, to look towards the university as a possibility in their future. And here, where it's local, so there's less disruption to the family if the family isn't comfortable with them moving far away to go to a university. It's here. It's their resource. They should be coming here. Why aren't we getting these women to come to the university, *if* it's something they want? Do they even see it as a possibility in their lives? So looking at setting up the pipeline in hopes that in fifteen years women in the high schools won't even question whether it's their right to a university education if they want it, or question that they could come here, and there would be financial aid, and there would be support for them here. That there are faculty who would understand the issues they are bringing, or the kind of research they want to do. You take one step at a time, and build it, but you've got to think in the long run. And you don't want to when you're angry about something. (laughter) It's just so hard.

I would say all of us went through burnout in various ways. Beatriz went . . . I remember when she chose to go to Europe. It was just after I was re-classed, I believe, or just before. She needed to get away. She was exhausted. She had pulled off some incredible things, dreams that the policy board had come up with, and they had too. They had to go back to research, and she had to go away for a while.

So I'll go back into that in a minute, but I also want to touch on what happened to many of the policy board members who put in . . . because they saw so much that needed to be done for women on campus, they spent a lot of time with students, which then affected their own tenure struggles, their own research time. Their research that they were doing with students might not be considered appropriate for the academy, or of a quality . . . I don't remember all the terms that are used in tenure review. They may not have published as often as they needed to, because they were involved in trying to bring

women along with them, like I talked about yesterday. Many of them burned out, and either left the academy, or went to teach at Cabrillo [College] instead because the publishing requirements were not so high, and they loved working with people, which was hard to do while publishing. The questions came up in the policy board, in the discussions at the center and the Feminist Studies FRA. It was almost like being a heretic to bring it up. Do women belong in the academy if this is the way the academy is structured? Can we change the structure of the academy?

**Reti:** Well, it's the master's house again, right?

**Osborne:** Yes. If you are a feminist you believe it's important to bring women along with you, have the networks, educate the younger women, and work with them, and bring them along as well. How do you then do what was set up to be a more isolated, individual activity, and succeed? And where do you undercut yourself, and then get blamed for it? Where does the blame go? The blame goes to you, because you didn't do what you should have done in this program. And yet, look at what you did! So how do you get credit for that, and not burn yourself out and leave the academy? Or your research suffers, your publishing suffers. And the achievements along the way— it blew my mind what they were achieving. There were some women that I saw manage to . . . and I don't know if they'd agree. But in my view, as someone working at the Women's Center day-to-day, watching someone like Aida Hurtado, who has a sharp political mind, and brought her research on women of color and how they were viewed in *Vogue* through time, for instance. (One of her studies.) And brought it to undergraduates, revealed it to undergraduates at one point, or anybody who wanted to come and see her slide show and where her research was at the time. Students talked about that for years afterwards. Staff and faculty talked about it for years. Graduate students. And I'm sure she burned out over and over. This was only one of the cutting-edge areas in which she



did research. She must have been on the edge of burnout all the time. But she still pushed for her research to go through the tenure process. I'm pretty sure we did a celebration at the time when she got tenure. We would have big celebrations when a woman got tenured here. "Women's Center! Celebrate!" And we would. We would have a big reception celebrating who was tenured now.

Yeah, we burned out. Because it's exhausting work. For two people to pull off what we pulled off, and we knew it was a big . . . and I'm not saying Beatriz and I did it alone, but a lot of the day-to-day stuff we did have to do. A lot of the support for the students who were doing it. Doing the general stuff, like typing minutes . . . By the time we'd gone through all of this and this discussion, who wanted to sit down and type minutes after that? But that was part of . . . they became legal documents and they had to be done. And they had to be there to inform the next meeting, or to inform the next group of people on the board. So there was a lot of the stuff that's "clerical." There was no money for other positions, so it had to be done. Beatriz and I were very committed to a feminist perspective on this, so we both did a lot of that work.

We often said we need to share the grunt work, because there's so much that needs to be done. Work-study students across campus often ended up in positions where they did the grunt work, the copying, whatever. And we, over and over, even though we were burned out, we would say, okay, what is the role of a student here? If we're telling them we want them to be a volunteer coordinator, we don't want them always doing the copying. We don't want them becoming the clerical of the unit just because it's more exciting for us to do the other stuff. Well, this stuff has to be shared. It's realistic that some of that goes into the position, but that's not what the position is about. The position is about developing and empowering this student. Yeah, when you're empowered

you've still got some grunt work to do, but we're not going to make them do all of it. So therefore we had to share it. It was a feminist organization.

**Reti:** You can look at it more as an apprenticeship position rather than, here, I'm going to get this person whom I going to pay very little to take on the grunt work.

**Osborne:** Right. The question was, what are we modeling? The question with that much full-time staff is, okay, we're modeling this. But are we modeling something that will build a woman manager someday, or a woman professor? Are we making them think the job is so much grunt work that they won't get to do the other . . . It's like always, what are you modeling for the women coming through, because it's a university. And then the feminist perspective of non-hierarchical was always a tricky one. So Beatriz and I pretty much shared a lot of the work. Again, I've got to say that strategy-wise I really consider Beatriz to be a brilliant person. We sat there and we threw ideas at each other, back and forth, on how to make something happen. She blew my mind again and again in terms of the political positioning that was necessary so that we didn't get taken down. I was much more of a practical, let's go in this direction, let's plan . . . She was more of a spur of the moment, let's go do this . . . We clashed a little bit in terms of her bringing something to me last minute and me going, "I hate last minute." Just because of who I was. That happens in any kind of job. You have styles. And we worked through that. I loved it. I loved working with her!

The amount of the work that we chose to do at the center that . . . Yeah, there was burnout always on the line there. Yet, the summers were a time to recover a bit because the students weren't there. It was time to get things caught up. Filing was always in a . . . (laughter) We didn't want students to have to come in and do filing. Periodically they would do a study of the Women's Center, or a history of something, and then, yeah, it made sense to pull out all of the stuff that needed filing and have them go through it, put it in categories.

In terms of burnout, Beatriz decided to go to Europe and take a little time away. Before she left, she spent, I would say, the better part of a year very focused on training me in the political aspects, in educating me about a lot of the stuff that she knew as a director that she wanted me to know because she was going to be gone. I'm trying to think of how it worked. I know I was the interim director twice, but I'm trying to remember if this was when I got promoted to assistant director, partly because of the level of what I was doing. We ended up splitting out a section of duties that were mine, and some that were hers, and that rated with an assistant director position, versus assistant to the director or a Blank Assistant, in terms of the classification system.

Then there was also the question of: if Bea were gone for a period of time, and I had to stand in the unit, given that the Women's Center was such a unique kind of unit, different from many others [what would my title be?] We were different in terms of what our agenda was in the community-campus thing, that not just anybody could sit in and take the unit while she was gone. It needed to be someone who understood what was going on on the policy board and had all the connections, and could keep that going. So, I'm trying to remember if the first time she went I was in charge as the assistant director, or whether I was an interim director that time. It was mostly over the summer so it was not that big of an issue. It's really not that important in the long run. At the same time, it also gave us an opportunity to broaden what students could do at the center, and to be more vital at the center.

Students really were a vital part of that center, in terms of making it run. Pilar Aguerro did all the flyers, posters, everything, and designed her own style. . . She worked there for four years, and did an excellent job, and went on to become a professional artist. The last I heard of her she was at the San Jose Museum of Art, both teaching and running exhibits and things like that. That's been a long time. I don't know where else she's gone since then, but she was a very good artist. I think one of the reasons she got the job at the

art museum, which included doing publicity for things and putting on events, was that she did a lot of that at the center, learned all those skills, developed her own style of graphic arts. I think she was the first student we really got on the computer, so she learned Pagemaker and . . . This was quite a big deal, to do all of this, to integrate photographs and artwork into our publicity. If our poster is on a bus stop and you drive by it on the shuttle, would you even notice it out of those hundreds of papers that used to be on the shuttle stops? She did a lot of work on that. She did what we considered really groundbreaking work, and moved on with it. So letting students know they weren't just there to mark time and get a few wages, but that out of it they were going to get job skills, perspective deepening, and being a vital part of the discussion about feminism and how it worked at the university, about the advancement of women and all of that. It was very critical.

**Reti:** Those are not skills that you get in a classroom. So they complement the academic side of university life very well.

**Osborne:** Yes. Women would come to the center hungry to apply the theories. The theories were what they had been studying for a couple of years, but they just needed something else. We were where they could apply women's studies. A lot of our work was who can we channel and where? Who needs people in the community? How does this fit together with what you want to study and what your program is? Or, what do you want to start, and who in the community would be a good organization to work with on that?

### **Networking With Other Women's Centers**

**Reti:** Let's talk about your relationship with other women's centers, both within the UC system and nationally. How much connection was there?

**Osborne:** There was connection, because there was a UC women's centers coalition. We would usually have yearly UC women's centers meetings, and it would rotate between the different women's centers. Some women's centers were closer to what we did. Others were farther away. Some of them incorporated rape prevention and the women's center in one unit. We were very clear here that we didn't want to do that. Again, when you combine, it's easier to lose funding, or have cutbacks that deeply hurt both units. I don't know how it is now. But it was also very clear that the work Gillian [Greensite] was doing was groundbreaking in its own right, and if we merged that, it could dilute it. And plus, she wanted autonomy in many ways. Rape prevention was always a constant discussion among all the women's centers. Was rape prevention something that comes under law enforcement? Because every university was constantly changing where they came in the budget, or who they were under. Is it a Student Services thing? Is it a women's center thing? Here, Gillian insisted that rape is not just a woman's issue, so [rape prevention] should not go under the Women's Center or be merged with the Women's Center. It is an issue for every student at the university, male or female, for every staff or faculty member at the university, or anyone who comes to visit the university. The design of rape crisis programs at other women's centers was built on her program. It was a groundbreaking design. We may have had one of the first rape prevention/education units on campuses, even before we had a women's center.

Now a lot of women's centers are more of a research thing, like [UC] Davis had a library and research, and had programming, kind of two arms. We decided not to have a library, as I talked about yesterday. Not to do a library at the Women's Center. Not to become *the* women's library, the only place to find books on women's issues or by women scholars.

### **The Women's Center Library**

**Reti:** But you do have a library. It makes sense to me that you wanted the academic research collection in women's studies to be at the University Library, and that Jacquelyn

Marie as the Women's Studies Librarian was developing that. But what was the purpose (I know we're getting off of the women's centers, but we can come back to that) of the library, as you saw it?

**Osborne:** Well, women came into the Women's Center for various meetings and things, and they might not be a feminist. The idea was to have books available that women could browse while they were standing there in a break at a meeting, and it might open a door to them in some way. We used to publish this little flyer that said, "Do you believe that women and men should be paid the same thing for the same job?" That kind of thing. And at the bottom it said, "Then you're probably a feminist." (laughter) "Do you believe women should have affordable childcare?" That kind of thing. Most women agreed with that. But feminism at that time still had this reputation of the burning bra syndrome, you know. Only one or two women ever burned their bras. It's just like during the 1989 earthquake. The same image was played over and over, and it's the one that was always revived for whatever newspaper article on feminism. The same photographs again and again, so you'd think it was done everywhere, constantly. But that was not the issue. That was not feminism. That may have been one rebellion within it. Why are we confining our bodies in this way? But that was not . . . (laughter) you know. And yet, because there's always backlash to society changing of values and things, a lot of women came in with, "Well, I don't want to be identified with that." And the idea that lesbians were also feminists. Does that mean if you're a feminist you are also a lesbian? Or do you get accused of being a lesbian because you're a feminist? I mean, all these kinds of accusations that happen, accusations and targeting people as a way to force people back to the norm in society.

So a lot of that became internalized in all of us as women, and the Women's Center was about educating about that. What did we internalize? What are our fears? Who are we

afraid will target us? What happens if we get targeted? What do we lose, gain? What does it mean in terms of our lives, and our families, and our relationships?

So the library there was set up to be kind of a variety of collections, donated books, an introduction to women's issues books. There were special things, like Judy Yung donated a copy of one of her studies about Chinese women in San Francisco. There were books written by women here at the university. They were also in the women's studies [collection in the University] Library here. And Jacquelyn Marie would make sure that we got excess copies of something so they could be used for browsing. It was not a library where we were real good about being able to control what got checked in and out, because people met at the center even when staff wasn't there. So books disappeared and came, and we figured that was a great service to the community. Because they would come and go, it meant people were using them. They were going somewhere. It's like all of our work. If it ripples out from here, then we figure someone will eventually benefit. One woman will talk to another woman, who talks to three women, who talks to four more . . . And the ripple effect is very large. So that's what that library was about.

### UC Women's Centers

**Reti:** Thanks. Okay. So returning to the connections between women's centers. You had this meeting within UC. So you had a connection with other UC women's centers?

**Osborne:** Yes, and we often talked about our varying structures and why. We were unique. A few others served the community, but not in the way that we did. A lot of them looked at our structure and policy board and were horrified at the idea of having to have something like that. And have so many women giving input. I mean, within feminists, some are more comfortable with a more hierarchical structure, or a more collaborative structure. We didn't always call it collaborative. There were all kinds of

words that came up over that, but I'm not going to get into that. So some were horrified at the way that we worked, and others were intrigued by it, and wanted to incorporate some of it. The meetings were an exchange of information among the women's centers. What kinds of programs, what kinds of resources could we share if we want a certain speaker to come through? Can several centers book them the same quarter so that the travel expenses, the honorarium expenses wouldn't be as high? Any way to help make our quality of programming better, and our services to whomever we were serving better and at the same time maximize our funding.

We talked about what kind of staff or faculty positions each center had, how to keep staffing, how to keep funding. What kinds of positions did they open for students? What did we have? I wouldn't say we were really, really different in terms of the needs of the students. It seems that one or two at times provided childcare for students, and that was a real struggle. We had a childcare center on campus. Some of them had childcare centers, but it depended on the programs they had. Were they part of an Early Childhood Education program like at Cabrillo [College]? Were they for studying the kids, versus, were they a service for the students so they could actually go to school? I would say every center was somewhat different. I, of course, felt that we were leading the way (laughter) but I'm not sure that's really true. I'm not sure they felt that way. (laughter) But I know that people would get very excited about the stuff we were doing here.

We often worked together with [UC] Santa Barbara or [UC] Irvine. It depended on who were the directors at the different centers. [UC] San Francisco was more of a medical campus. We did work with the director up at San Francisco a lot, but what she was able to do and what we were able to do were two very different things. Her constituency was much more graduate students because it was a different kind of campus. And [UC] Davis. We would work with them a lot. We had a northern California and a southern



California meeting each year or half year, and then a meeting of all of the centers yearly, or every two years. I wouldn't say we were all on the same page, but as we got together and shared things we broadened each other's horizons about what feminism was, or how we were, without realizing it, selling ourselves short, or amputating parts of what was possible because of pressures at the time, whether they were societal, or needs that we were focusing on, or funding cuts from the university or something. And going, "Wait a minute. Does this make sense in the long run? How are we going to affect ourselves in the long run if we do this?" Those were great discussions.

**Reti:** What about beyond UC, to the national level? I know the National Women's Studies Association at this point sponsors a meeting of women's centers at their national conference.

**Osborne:** I don't remember any meetings that were women's centers across the country. I know at times we were in contact with women from other centers, for various reasons, to work with speakers, or to look at programs they were doing and how did they develop them? We had a book that Jacquelyn Marie helped us get on women's centers across the country, and we also kept ongoing phone numbers of various women's centers because we had women who came here from specific universities, often from the East Coast, who believed that Santa Cruz was more open to women's issues than their university, so they would transfer here, or come here afterwards as a grad student or whatever. A lot of the Eastern schools in Massachusetts. Often women came from Massachusetts to Santa Cruz. But I wouldn't say in particular there were ones we worked with more than others.

**Reti:** I think what I'm asking is, did you feel that you were part of a national movement to establish women's centers on college campuses? Was there that kind of consciousness?

## The Institutionalization of Racism

**Osborne:** I think probably initially, yes. But then it was more of a networking kind of thing. What are you doing there? What's happening there? How are you affected by this there? I felt over the years in a lot of those meetings that we were more on the cutting edge in terms of diversity issues. Other than Beatriz, there was no other director for years among the UC centers, or among many national women's centers, who was a woman of color.

**Reti:** Whoa! I didn't realize that.

**Osborne:** So Beatriz stood out in the ranks. And it meant that we made connections that they couldn't make. If we hadn't had Beatriz as a director there're a lot of alliances we never could have made. That was one of the things we discussed at the meeting of all-UC Women's Centers. Having a woman of color as a director in the position of power and then the white women as the support staff is something you might want to look at, even as a statement, you know. And so when you're doing a director search and looking for candidates, definitely don't get token candidates. Get somebody who knows what they're doing. Affirmative action has a long history and was done very poorly in many areas, but it was something that was discussed over and over again at the Women's Center, because we saw women hired on campus, again and again, who were token hirings, giving a nod to affirmative action, and then were never given the support they needed as an employee, to do the position they were chosen to do. Then they were expected to represent all women of color, all women of their ethnicity. I mean, all that kind of . . . (pounding the table, laughter) I am starting to pound the table. It happened with faculty. It happened with staff. It happened with students, over and over and over again. The tokenizing of people. And so for us to have a director who was Chicana and an activist . . .

Beatriz got away with saying things in some of those meetings that they could attribute to her being Chicana and an activist, when in fact it was a statement about feminism or diversity that needed to be made, that they needed to hear. Bea and I would talk about that on the way to meetings, or on the way back. She could act up in some situations, and they would say, "Oh, it's just because she's a Chicana." Well, I know it wasn't. She was trying to tweak their minds to start thinking a little differently. I'm not saying these women were in any way dense or whatever, but once you are in a position, you've got a career position you've been working for, so who wants to resign just to get a woman of color in there? I mean, these are issues about feminism that have to be talked about. There are times when you need to back away from something in order to make an advance. When do you do it? And when does it cost you, career-wise? Or, how do you look at that? Those are tough issues and had to be brought up among all of these women's centers. Beatriz brought it up, and I brought it up among other levels of the staff. It was kind of like good cop/bad cop. We would work different areas. I would be talking with the support staffs of the women's centers, and she would be talking with the directors, because there were director meetings and other meetings, within our gatherings. We would be looking at why are the women of color all relegated to the lower-level positions? Why are all of the directors white? The white directors were talking about it. It was not like they were trying to stay exclusive. But it was like, "This is a problem. If we don't have positions to hire staff, how do we become more diverse, more representative?"

**Reti:** There was an institutionalization of racism.

**Osborne:** Yes. There are only so many positions. How do we do something about this? "Does this mean I have to quit?" It's a real question. How do you then develop positions? How do you develop women who traditionally haven't been in those positions, and make it happen? And what are our own biases about that? We had to talk

about all of it. This is probably a dialogue that's still going on. How does an institution of any kind, or a unit of any kind, become seen as one thing or another, or feel comfortable to everyone, to only certain groups of women? We didn't want to be a white women's women's center. We wanted the dialogue, the richness that it brings of a lot of people getting together. So that was always a really big question. And Beatriz, I am sure over the years, fielded questions and fielded concerns about had she sold out in one way or another? That's always an issue when you become a powerful woman of color.

**Reti:** Because she was an activist and she was working for the university?

**Osborne:** Well, and who she was working with. If some high-powered faculty she was working with had made some students of color, some grad students, or another faculty member angry, and Bea had alliances with both, what did it mean about Beatriz? I mean, this is politics, and this is about a systematic oppression. It's a system, and it functions to protect itself. And it pits us against each other, even if we are trying to work in the same direction, even if some of us are blundering, and some are focused. It still pits us against each other. We had to constantly look at that, advancing all women, not just some women, not just the women of this political persuasion, or this ethnicity, or this privilege. If we're talking feminism as we understood it at the time, we couldn't eliminate anybody. We had to really look at what makes women of color comfortable? What makes all women comfortable for a dialogue? Where do white women . . . where are they drawing their own privilege line in the sand, and unwilling to cross it? Where are they appropriating something where they shouldn't be? All these questions have to be constantly asked if we're talking feminism. And sometimes we were told, "Well, you ought to be called the Multicultural Center, not the Women's Center, because you are always bringing this up." But you know what? It is endemic. It is part of and critical to looking at what feminism is—it is not *one* woman's movement. It's many women's movements. Feminism has many, many perspectives within it. And if we're not talking

about and listening to as many of them as we can all the time, then we're not talking. We're not there to serve women.

So the dialogue had to be happening as much as we could make it happen. There was a time on campus when there were staff groups that were formed by various ethnic groups of staff. And again, the question was well, what about a white women's group? (sigh) Just as the world is a men's world, much of the world, much of the privilege that women have gained is white women's privilege. So then what? So yeah, sometimes you have to get in your groups, whatever they are, the various forms of groups, to talk about specific issues to your group, your own isms, your own internalized stuff, your own needs. If I'm going to put forth an agenda, what are my needs here? Where do they coincide with another group's, and where are they different? Can we ally with this group for this thing and still not agree with them on that? Or are they going to want us to agree to everything, when in fact we don't, or in fact some of the stances they are taking are going to hurt us; some of the things we're taking are going to hurt them. How do you then also build an alliance around certain issues you do agree on? That's feminism, as I see it.

**Reti:** Absolutely.

**Osborne:** It's not monolithic, by any means. And it's constantly changing.

And within those meetings the question was always brought up, "You aren't being accountable to women of color. We need to have a caucus. Or we need to break into caucuses." Then everybody would sigh. "Oh, God. We've been through this." Well, yeah. If you'd been through it and we had fixed it, we wouldn't be going through it again. So that was always . . . I mean, Beatriz and I would be bringing that up in our respective areas, or wherever we were. Because that was our perspective, that sighing isn't going to fix it, and being sick of hearing about it isn't going to fix it. Being sick of hearing about it is a level of privilege.

**Reti:** Yes. If you are living with racism as a woman of color you don't get to take a break.

**Osborne:** That's right. And then there's like, when do you end up being a champion . . . There's another level of appropriation, "I'm going to speak for all women of color as a white woman." No, no, no, no. That doesn't work either. So how do you . . . This is a dialogue that is probably going to go on until the end of time. It's all about power, and if we can talk about it. I think one of our quarterly programming topics was women and power, looking at it from all these different levels. Where do women get power? How do they use it when they get it? What is the system? And if a woman gets power, does she then look out for her sisters, or does she walk away? How does she use it?

**Reti:** Well, you formed a very powerful alliance, you and Beatriz. You, as a white feminist with very strong anti-racist politics, working with her. That's a very powerful model.

**Osborne:** It is. And it doesn't mean either of us didn't blunder at times (laughter) because we had to constantly learn.

**Reti:** Exactly. I think many white women are terrified of blundering, so we don't even want to deal with racism, which is not a solution either. It's really inspiring.

**Osborne:** It is. And it was inspiring as a white woman to be trusted at times, and what a level of responsibility I felt at that moment. And uncertainty about myself, self-questioning. And yet, I think that is critical to being a feminist. If you're going to be trusted you have to look . . . I mean, racism and sexism and all of the isms are so internalized within everything that . . . I would be at home . . . I mean, talk about burnout. I would be at home reading books trying to understand what I might say at a moment that could screw everything up. What might I say unknowingly? And was I willing to forgive myself if I did it? Would I be forgiven by other people if I did it? What was I thinking? Was I really thinking clearly, or was I acting on automatic pilot, and what

did that mean in the long run? You can never act automatically when you are on the front line in something. You have to really scrutinize yourself every minute. That's exhausting. And yet it is what I consider necessary in an academic institution. That is part of the dialogue, too. Also, being willing to make the blunders and apologize, and it doesn't mean you'll always be forgiven. But you've got to be willing to put yourself out there. And that's a scary place for a lot of people. They don't want to put themselves out there. I didn't always want to put myself out there.

**Reti:** And for women, particularly.

**Osborne:** Yes, and it led to a lot of things on campus here . . . The PC [politically correct] debate. It leads to a lot of times not saying what you might be thinking underneath. So Beatriz and I would sit there and just throw it all out on the table, and just discuss, discuss, discuss. "How do we . . . Well, what are the biases in this? Where am I coming from? I can't believe I just said that." Either one of us. Because we're talking about issues of power. When you have power what you say has ripples that are different from when you don't have power. And that is a trust that you have to really think about.

### **The University as a Dialogue**

At the same time, sometimes you have to step out there and be politically incorrect in order to jog the discussion. Beatriz would do that very well. She would be like a devil's advocate. She used to drive some people crazy! I just loved it. She'd be a devil's advocate and throw something out there, and people would be like (gasp), "You can't say that!" She's like, "Well, what are the reasons why? Okay. So let's talk about what's coming up right now."

The university's a dialogue. You can't shut down parts of it. There was a time when . . . Was it Susan Harding who was talking about . . . and I think this is very important now to look at, given the power of the Religious Right in the country right now, of

fundamental religion all over the world, what's going on with that. She was studying the Religious Right, and she thought it was important to study them, and understand where they were coming from. Other feminists were like, "Oh, no! Because then you become a part of it. You become a part of the problem." And she's like, "No, you need to understand your enemy." Feminists went over this discussion for years. "Understand where men are coming from? Well, I don't want to!" "Well, you know what? If you don't understand what their needs and wants are, how are you then going to negotiate for power?" "I'm not negotiating for power." Well, sometimes you do, and sometimes you don't. Sometimes you demand it.

And yet, what is the discussion? If you want to go from here to here, how are you going about it? What tools are you going to use? Yeah, they're the master's tools, okay. Can you develop new tools? Like Joy Harjo, can you develop a new language? Can you develop a new music? Can you develop a new poetry that doesn't use the master's tools? It's like, okay, where are we going here? This is the discussion that has to be brought up, and sometimes you have to be a devil's advocate to jog people out of complacency, or thinking they've got it solved when it's not solved. Because some people in the room are with what's going on, and some are not. Yeah, you can pretend everybody's with you, but they aren't. I think of the Women of Color Film Festivals, the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, some of the conferences that we did in conjunction with the Feminist Studies FRA, or various women's studies students, things that Wendy Chapkis would bring up, she was on our programming committee for a long time on the board. Some of those things were just amazing for opening up some of these dialogues, and giving people a place that felt safe to enter some of the dialogue, without feeling on the spot right away.

I don't think you can talk about feminism without talking about the old words 'multicultural,' or 'diversity,' or 'representation.' Frankly, I think we lost affirmative action because so many people did lip service to it. I'm not saying it was our fault. It was



a move, a deliberate move against it. But I also think it's a real loss, because I saw gains made there that were just tremendous, in spite of all the ways that people used it wrongly. You can use it wrong in order to undercut it and make it not work. And that's what I saw on campus a number of times, was women being hired into positions as women, or women of color, various levels, and then being undercut by whoever hired them, or not getting the support. Or being hired into a position that they weren't qualified for, so that someone could get a number, but then be shown that they could fail. "See, see. Women can't . . . This ethnicity can't do this." Don't give me that. That's wrong! That is a misuse of power. That kind of stuff needs to be talked about all the time. I don't think we've resolved that.

Some of our discussions at the Women's Center were about backlash. And when Susan Faludi's book came out . . . (I think we brought Susan Faludi at some point. Or we were trying to. We were trying to bring so many people.) But anyway, her book *Backlash* . . . She and Gloria Steinem, in my mind, and I may be wrong, but in my mind are two of the last true investigative journalists who look at feminist issues and where they are, and do true investigative journalism. Not just get on the Web and pull down resources. They did groundbreaking work. Faludi's book *Backlash* is something that never got quite the notoriety it should have had. She was looking at the backlash to the various parts of the women's movement, or the various gains women had made. And it's scary. I mean, backlash, it's . . . I've seen us go backward. And you do. You do over time. But she laid it all out. She did an exhaustive study. For instance, the bra burning idea. I'm not sure that was in her book, but this would be an example. She would go back and investigate how many times was it documented that women burned their bras? And in what materials? Oh! Then this person quoted that person, and they made it sound like a new incident. Then that person quoted . . . I mean, this was investigative journalism. In fact, it may not have ever happened in the first place. And yet it was built up as if it did, and then it became a lever to use against a gain being made by women, or some equality happening,

or some equal pay happening, or some childcare happening. Very good work. A book that's long been overlooked. I would hope that students in journalism, or women going into journalism who really want to do investigative journalism look at both of those women. Because they just . . . I don't see it being done anymore. I think that's why we've allowed our press to be censored with the two Gulf Wars. That's a women's issue. Because when you look at how many women and children have died in those conflicts, and as a result of the breakdown and the destruction of the infrastructure, the numbers are appalling, and we don't hear about that. That's the kind of stuff that comes up at the Women's Center. What about the five hundred thousand children who died as a result of the first Gulf War, just as collateral damage afterwards? What are the terms that are used? What can be done to bring that to light? We had faxes coming in from Turkey, from Germany, from all sorts of places where the news was not censored in the same way ours was. That's what would come into the Women's Center and inform the discussions. As soon as faxes and internet and all that happened, we were using them right away to make those connections. The students were there were doing that, and the grad students were doing that, and the faculty was doing that.

That, for me, was a really big deal at the Indigenous California Women's Conference. There were indigenous organizations all over the world that were giving us ideas on how they brought people together, on how they did conferences, on the issues that might want to be discussed, or, "Wow! You're going to do a conference. Tell us how you're doing it. Where did you find the funding? Where did you succeed when you were trying to make an impact in this area?" The internet was powerful. There were faculty all over the campus, and instructors all over the campus, like Guillermo DelGado, who were feeding us information on various indigenous networks that could be tied in through the Internet.

**Reti:** This was very early internet, because this was 1992.

**Osborne:** Yes, when I'm saying internet, I'm talking mostly email. It wasn't web pages.

**Reti:** Because we didn't have the Web yet.

**Osborne:** Right. But making those email contacts. The discussions across boundaries and borders was amazing.

## **The Loma Prieta Earthquake**

**Reti:** Let's talk about the Loma Prieta Earthquake on October 17, 1989.

**Osborne:** I was in the Women's Center for the earthquake. It's an historic house, and the chimneys came down. There were two chimneys, one in the middle of the living room, which a lot of people don't know about anymore, and one in the kitchen. There's an L-shaped living room now. There was a fireplace in the middle of that L. It was a fireplace on both sides, a beautiful fireplace. Not functioning well. It smoked up the house, as did the one in the kitchen. The one in the kitchen drew a little better. We didn't use them much.

Both chimneys came down. The back chimney came down over the back steps. The front chimney came down over the front porch. And I was literally holding on to at least one or two of the students. I remember, I had the phone in one hand and I was talking to Francisco Alarcón, who was in the Learning Center at Oakes [College]. And the lights were falling from the ceiling. We were on the phone at the time. And we just . . . I don't know why I had the phone in my hands for the whole earthquake. I'm holding onto a student who wanted to run outside. I'm trying to brace myself in a doorway. And we were standing under . . . We were standing both in the doorway to my office at the time. There were two of us there, and I was holding the phone, and the student. And then there was a beam right there, (or we thought there was a beam there) in another doorway. I think there were about three students with me at the time. We were waiting.

It was like riding a boat. It was such a shaking. The computers fell off the desks and were hanging by their wires. And we were barely . . . I was getting banged into the doorway. We thought we were pretty safe because we were standing there, but I could hear the chimneys coming down, and we knew that was possible. I was holding onto this one student who was panicked. She was a re-entry woman whose children came home from school up in Boulder Creek. Her house was on the edge of a cliff, and they would come home from school and watch TV for the hour and a half until she came home from campus. She was in a panic about her children, a total panic. And she was trying to run out the door. We could hear things falling, and I was afraid she was going to get killed as she ran out the door. It was very scary. What I remember was there was a pause in the shaking, and I was holding onto the receiver, and I could hear stuff falling on Francisco's end.

There was glass everywhere. I said, "Francisco, are you there?" He said, "Yeah. The lights are falling down. We better hang up." Our computers were on the floor, almost. They were hanging by their cords. I wanted to get everybody out of the center. I'm wondering where my kids are. I mean, we are all, like, freaking out. So we go outside and we're standing there looking for any wires that might come down, and where could we stand? I'm looking down the hill, because one of my kids was supposed to be at a soccer practice at the school right there, just down the hill from the Women's Center. We could hear sirens starting to go off downtown. Then the shaking started again. We were outside. We were looking at trees. Then when it stopped again I had to go inside to get my keys, and to lock up, and I wasn't sure what to do.

**Reti:** How terrifying.

**Osborne:** Yeah, it was a very, very scary thing. We could hear sirens. But otherwise, it was dead silence. All the ambient noise was gone, all the traffic noise. We had heard some crashes, or some things falling, somewhere in town. We didn't know what they

were. We didn't know if it was going to continue. I said to the students. "Be careful, but I know you're going to go. So go carefully. Watch where you are." Then they left. And the woman went speeding up to Boulder Creek. Her children were fine, by the way. Her house didn't go over the cliff. But I don't think she stayed in that house much longer. It was just scary to her. I wanted to be on a phone, but you're not supposed to be on phones. So what I did was lock up the center, try to make sure things were off. I'm pretty sure I turned off the gas. Dorothy, the groundskeeper came around. She and I talked about it. She had been working outside. We made sure the gas was off, and then we took off.

I went to find my kids. One wasn't at soccer practice, so I was panicked about where he was. I found all of my children. One of them got thrown out of the pool at the high school by the water sloshing. We were living at Oakes. I was a preceptor at Oakes, in Casa Huerta. So I had to go back and deal with those students. My son went and checked on my mother at our house on Dufour [Street] and then came up to the university on his bike. I managed to find all three kids. They were fine. My mother was fine. Then I had to deal with fifty students in my dorm, who all were panicked, because some of them had parents who lived in San Francisco, or lived in Oakland, and went from San Francisco to Oakland across the bridge at five p.m. every day. Someone had a radio and they could hear the bridge had fallen. Of course that was repeated again and again and again, that cars went in. They panicked. The initial reports were very scary.

The earthquake went on for days. We were all outside. We couldn't go back in the center. We couldn't go anywhere for days. The university had to assess what was safe and what wasn't.

**Reti:** Right. And you were in an historic building so you were in a different situation than those of us working in modern buildings.

**Osborne:** Exactly. We were low on the priority list. Housing was high priority, and laboratories, and what might become further hazards were higher on the priority list for the initial engineering checks, before people could go back in. We started getting damage repaired, finally, [but] we had to find funding for that. It was just this whole thing, getting a FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] loan. I mean, it was not a simple thing to get the university repaired at that point. It wasn't like, "Oh good, now we just fix it." It involves money. So there were FEMA things that had to happen, and all this, and we had to do a lot of paperwork and assess things.

Anyway, we finally were getting the Women's Center repaired. We decided to leave the chimney down in the living room. It made a big open space. It had not been functioning that well, and yet it was a change in an historic structure. It was Lee Duffus's suggestion. I had to take the lead in terms of earthquake repairs. Part of my duties was the facility itself. But we made a decision, and the policy board agreed with it. Lee Duffus was in agreement. We had to deal also with the neighbors, with the historic [preservation] people [who agreed] that we would leave the fireplace down, that an earthquake was an historic happening, therefore history had changed the structure and appearance of the Women's Center, of Cardiff House.

**Reti:** That's a very good argument.

**Osborne:** Historic structures had to be repaired, and yet there was no funding for that. What were we going to do? Would we have to shut down the Women's Center? What was going to happen? Chimneys were very expensive. Getting people to work on chimneys was difficult at that time. There were so many chimneys across the county that were down. What were we going to do? So what we ended up doing was the FEMA applications through the university, and the chimney in the kitchen was re-poured. It was poured, not as brick, but as cement this time, but to the exact dimensions and built to look exactly like the old one. But also built to draw better, so fires could be built in it. It

had the side ovens and everything, and it was built to look just like the old one. They followed exactly what it looked like. They changed the external chimney on the roof. Any retrofits or any repairs had to be done to earthquake standards. So that was another question. Were we going to have to put in a sprinkler system, or what were we going to have to do? All this stuff was up. And it was in that process that we discovered that where we were standing there was no beam.

**Reti:** (gasp)

**Osborne:** In the living room, between the older part of the house and the newer part of the house. It looked like a beam in the ceiling, but there was no beam. It was just two roofs coming together and there was no supporting structure at all. So we were probably standing in the worst possible place. And thank God the roof didn't come down. But it could have. So then there was this whole putting in of a beam, and what would that do to the historic structure? Would it change the appearance? It was a big deal.

And then in the midst of that we were thinking, well, can we finally deal with the paint that's peeling off the inside of the house? We'd been trying to get the center repainted from the time we got the Cardiff House. There was never any money for it. It was always the last on the list for funding for that kind of thing. Could we finally get it painted now? Because the paint was falling off the outside. It looked terrible. Then the question came up, "Well, if you do that, it's lead paint, it's so old." The questions about asbestos and lead had come into being after the [Cardiff House] was dedicated to the Women's Center. So we had real problems there. Because it meant that not only had we been last on the list, but now it was going to cost even more if we dealt with it. So that became another thing that we were going to have to deal with, and did eventually deal with.

So we did get it repaired. At that point we tried to get funding for better lighting, figuring we're doing all this, we might as well do that at the same time. That didn't happen either. We tried.

We found the building itself made it through the earthquake pretty well. It was built in the 1850s. There was no major structural damage. Except for that beam, we did fine. It had been through several earthquakes, obviously. The 1906 earthquake was not as bad here. It's bedrock under the campus, as I understand it. There are some problems with caves in the limestone. But from what I understand . . . I actually talked to a geologist on campus. He knew the geology of the campus. He had done a study of it. He explained that we were pretty much on bedrock there. So in 1906 it probably wasn't as severe either as it was in San Francisco.

**Reti:** Oh, sure. That makes a huge difference.

**Osborne:** And there's always fill. San Francisco has a lot of fill because of the old ships and things. They put fill over those. There were so many sailing ships left up there after the Gold Rush that they put fill over. This is the archaeologist part of me talking. There were a lot of them abandoned there because they went and never went back, so many people came so quickly to the Gold Rush area.

**Reti:** I never knew that. So did the Women's Center become actively involved in trying to serve the community after the earthquake?

**Osborne:** Yes. Watsonville and especially the Latino community had been hit hard by the earthquake. We had a number of Spanish-speaking students on staff. I was at Casa Huerta. I was the first preceptor of that dorm. I had to kind of operate the Women's Center out of my preceptor apartment at Oakes, until we could get back in, (laughter) so we did a lot of work there and meetings there.



We combined the students from Oakes and the Women's Center, and Francisco Alarcón and Elba Sanchez from the Spanish for Spanish Speakers program. Some of our Women's Center volunteers and staff went down to Watsonville. And we worked with the organizations we already worked with in Beach Flats, and channeled and donated food and clothing down to these areas, partly because these students could speak Spanish, and that was very needed right then, for a lot of the relief effort, and because they understood the needs. Because when people are in stress, most of us tend to go to our mother language. Our emotional language is often our mother tongue, at least that's what I believe. But that's also the way students often expressed it to me. So yeah, we were a hub of getting things channeled down into the Watsonville area, where the damage was really severe. People were out of their homes for months and months, and living in fields in tents. Beatriz took a leading role in that. I had to deal with the center's structure and she was dealing with the relief effort.

But yes, immediately the policy board, the members of the programming committee, and other committees got together, from the Women's Center, at other places than the Women's Center. Sometimes we met outside (well, we couldn't go in for a long time) and worked on that kind of stuff. The university pretty much stopped for a while too. So what were the students going to do? It got the students active in doing something. A lot of them couldn't go home or couldn't do much, and it made them feel of use.

And then Francisco, who was one of our Women's Center volunteers always, and was always doing something to work with the Women's Center, Francisco Alarcón wrote his earthquake poems. One of the first things that happened, as I remember it, was he did a reading at the Women's Center afterwards of some of his earthquake poetry, and other people read their poetry, and that was a big deal. It was very special.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>. *Quake Poems* (We Press, 1989).

Not much more about the earthquake. A lot of it was about individual stories. It was very important for people to tell their story at that time. Part of dealing with the trauma was for people to tell their own perspective of what happened, and where they were, and who they were with. And the stories have changed. I had to laugh, because last year I was at a talk that Francisco Alarcón was doing, and he was talking about the earthquake, and his memory was of being on the phone in the Learning Center, but he was talking to someone else on the phone. So that was really funny. I was like, okay, that's my story, and that's his story now. Before we had talked about being on the phone. So I'm like, I don't care. Whatever the story is, it doesn't matter, because what it is is the essence of what happened at the earthquake. I'm a fiction writer. What can I say? Who knows? My story may have changed completely over time. I don't know.

**Reti:** Well, that's the essence of oral history as well. (laughter)

**Osborne:** That's right. (laughter)

### **Parity for Staff Women on Campus**

**Reti:** We're going to start today by talking about Nicolette Czarrunchick, the women's studies department assistant, or board assistant as you knew her.

**Osborne:** Yes. Well actually, she wasn't at first. We were all Blank Assistants together, and then the board got her re-classed, which is also an interesting story.

**Reti:** Right, because women's studies was a program, not a board, when you came.

**Osborne:** That's right. And then board assistants got re-classed further to take into account all the work that they did. And that's where Teresa Ronsse was reading her job description next to that of a painter. Remember that?

**Reti:** No, I wasn't at that event.

**Osborne:** That was one of those events about women and wages. It was something the Women's Center co-sponsored. The board assistants were trying to get recognized for the level of work they did. I mean, the skill level that was required, first to get a position, and then the amount of work on advising of students, curriculum, writing, organizing, doing travel, searches—all of this stuff was on their plate. And at one point Teresa Ronsse from the linguistics board put together this reading that she and some other board assistants did, and the Women's Center and policy board talked about ways to really bring this up. Because she came and talked with us about it, too. So there was this big meeting. Wendy Mink and others were very involved in this. We were at Classroom Unit II. It wasn't very full, but it was a meeting on women's issues. I remember Julia Armstrong was there, and the man who was the head of Personnel, Jim Pacino. It was called Personnel at the time. It wasn't yet Human Resources. He left shortly after that. I don't know if that was the reason, but it was a very embarrassing thing for him. Teresa and this other woman got up, and they read back and forth, line by line, the job description for a painter on campus and a board assistant. Then at the end they read the pay. And it was like, I don't know, a thousand or fifteen hundred a month more for the painter than for the board assistant. There was no one in that room who could say that the level of skill required, the amount of training, the level of work was higher for a painter than for a board assistant. It was very clear. And someone in the room, I think it may have been Wendy Mink or Beatriz, had given the statistics for how many women were in one position and how many men were in the other. Clearly it was a gender issue.

**Reti:** Board assistant positions are almost completely held by women, or at least they were at that time.

**Osborne:** Right, I think there was only one man at the time, over in the sciences. And then they read the salary. I remember the head of Personnel standing up and going, "But you don't understand. We classed it this way because he is a technician. That is *very*

intricate knowledge you need in order to deal with the hazardous materials." And it was like dead silence in the room. Because we had just read the number of computer programs, the level of curriculum understanding, the level of advising that was done—all of that. It was just mind-blowing. That was one of my favorite moments. And Teresa did it at a couple of gatherings. First, she had done it in a staff group, where people had come to the Women's Center to talk about these issues, staff women.

**Reti:** So what was the outcome of that story? They were re-classed?

**Osborne:** Julia Armstrong stood up and said that this is really being looked at, and Willeen McQuitta of Personnel looked very thoughtful. It was around this time the associate chancellor, Jim Pacino, retired and left. And then she took over, and right within that time period they looked again at the classification system, and looked at those positions, and they did get re-classed. The painter may also have been re-classed at the same time. I don't know. But it was one of those discussions of when was this classification system set up? It was set up shortly after World War II. It was a very ancient system, and it was very much based on getting women out of the men's jobs as they returned from the war, and into certain positions. It had all the biases of the 1950s in it. Everyone recognized that at the time, and yet people seemed helpless to figure out how to change this system that had so many biases. I remember Valerie Simmons was there, because she was doing affirmative action at that time. She had just started, I think.

So some heavy questions were asked in these talks. It was one of those things that was very tricky for the Women's Center, because this was a labor issue, which is very tricky to do as a unit of the campus. And yet, it was also about the status of women on campus. So what we did was we facilitated in co-sponsorship with the Committee on the Status of Women. That way when it became a labor union issue or something, it was also about the status of women. And this is where [Wendy] Mink was so critical. Maybe we should talk about Wendy Mink.

**Reti:** Sure.

## Wendy Mink

**Osborne:** Wendy Mink was there at the beginning of the Women's Center. She was one of the founders, I believe. She worked . . . I have never seen someone produce so much work as Wendy Mink, and come to so many meetings, and follow what she believes in so strongly. The students used to be scared of her because she made them really work hard in her women and the law classes. They would be grumbling all through her classes, but by the end they were in love with her because of how much they had learned. She was a rigorous scholar. She would not let them slack off in any way. And yet they came out wanting to take every class they could from her because of the level of what they learned.

I got to serve with Wendy Mink on a number of things, but especially around sexual harassment issues, the status of women kinds of things. And there was a sexual harassment task force, that was joint . . . I believe there's a whole book about it at the Women's Center, a whole notebook about what went on. But this was a time just before the class action lawsuit against the university about the rapes that had taken place, and then the university in dealing with these . . . They were systematic rapes, is the only way I could describe them, some young men against some young women. They were older men, students who would prey on the young frosh women. Many of those women never came back to school, that I know of. I hope they went to school when they went back home. But many of them left school. The men ended up being transferred to another UC, which also became a scandal, and that women's center there, when they found out who these young men were . . . and it was happening again on their campus, they were angry. So that was a very difficult time.

But anyway, this task force was looking at: are we following the sexual harassment grievance procedures on campus? In fact, they had been set up, but they were not being followed. That was a real problem on campus. And Wendy Mink, tenured faculty, was very clear that this needed to be dealt with. She worked on that for years. She went at it from every direction, over and over and over, only to have it kind of die on an administrative level, or within the faculty senate at times. But there was a task force set up at one point. I believe it was a joint one . . . She was chair of the Committee on the Status of Women and then . . . I'm trying to think . . . I was the other co-chair of this committee, and I'm trying to think if it was because I was on the Sexual Harassment Education Committee, and then we made this task force to review the policies and make recommendations to the campus on what needed to be done. There were a lot of discussions; we interviewed a lot of people, came up with a lot of recommendations, including having a sexual harassment officer on campus, because that was required by law, and previously it had been just tacked on to people's job descriptions. It was called Title IX officer, and it was tacked on to a number of job descriptions, and sometimes over the years people didn't even know it was in their job description. So that was in direct violation of some things. This is as I remember it. Administrators may remember this very differently. So we made some very clear recommendations about that, and that there needed to be a separate office on this, and we actually recommended that it be a contract with an outside consultant, because we felt that over the years, over and over it had been shown that it was a conflict of interest for someone who was an employee of the university to try to resolve a dispute against the university. The Ombudsman's office did the best they could with many of these, but we often felt that . . . I mean, some of these were very . . . Why have them end up in a lawsuit if they could have been solved way ahead? And the lawsuit that came, as I understand it, was because the university did not follow their own procedures and then kind of made them up along the way and . . . I don't know. A lot of the recommendations that we had made at that time ended up

kind of as a shelved report, as many of them did, and yet came into being as the result of a lawsuit. Which never should have happened. And to me the sad part is that students' lives were really destroyed on many levels because of just not following our own policies.

I'm not going to say much more about that lawsuit, because I know part of the settlement agreement, from what I understand, was that people couldn't talk about it. I wasn't part of that settlement.

Adriana Cardenas was the investigator from the Department of Education, and she did the investigation at the Women's Center, so they used the conference room. And for me, the one story that . . . It was very poignant at the time and we had no way of really changing it, and yet it was also very appropriate in some ways. The art exhibit up at the time of the investigation when she was interviewing so many people who were either on campus in administrative positions and somehow had a level of responsibility in this, and then the students and the . . . The lawsuit was a class action suit of students, faculty, and staff against the university, which is probably the only way it would happen. Because there had been a number of grievances brought to the Department of Education in the past that had not gone anywhere. And so this group got together, found a lawyer who had done a number of suits against the university in the past, or had some experience, from what I understand, and when the Department of Education found there was some merit in the class action then . . . That's what the plaintiffs wanted. They didn't want money. They wanted this resolved. That was a very big, important step.

So anyway, the art exhibit at the center at the time that managers, and administrators, and students, and staff, and faculty were coming in, in ones and twos, to have these interviews with this investigator, was a senior art exhibit by a woman student who had undergone childhood sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Some of the pictures were very graphic, such as penises dressed up to look like soldiers marching. People would be

sitting in the living room, very nervous, because this was very difficult to go through, some of these interviews. I know some administrators, and I remember the chancellor having to come in on this, sitting there in the living room. I would often say, "I apologize for the art exhibit. I know this can be hard to sit here in this room. This was not planned. This was a student exhibit. If you're more comfortable sitting outside we've put some couches on the porch." But they would be sitting here looking at these very graphic images that this woman had dreamed up to express her pain about all of this stuff. People would sit there and get kind of red-faced. And Adriana, when she went down the hallway the first morning, said, "I can't believe this is up here." Because some of it also had writing. The student wrote about what it did to her life. It was very powerful. The students had to sign up in the fall, so we had no idea that this lawsuit was going to happen, or that Adriana would choose to want to do these interviews at the Women's Center in the conference room because it was away from campus and undisturbable. So we made sure no events were happening that would disturb her in there. And then they ended up in the back room, the conference room, where she [the artist] had some of her larger pieces. Oh! (laughter) Adriana had a few good laughs about that.

Wendy Mink, I think, created more change and pushed for more advancement of women on campus than almost anyone, besides maybe Helene [Moglen]. I watched her do it over and over and over. She was not going to let things ride. Often things would get brought up on campus about pay levels, or diversity, or affirmative action issues of various kinds, about how many women were in what positions, about glass ceilings, about sexual harassment of graduate students—many, many issues. And in the policy board meetings, in programming or whatever, she just would not let go of those issues until they had been dealt with. Often they got brought up and we had some programs, and then it just kind of died, and nothing changed. She very much supported staff women in trying to get change to happen. It was not a popular position to take. Even



feminists had struggles over it, and she had struggles with other feminists over some of the issues, and some of the tactics, or some of the positions that she took or they took.

But I also felt that she, because of her scholarship in the law and her understanding of politics within that, her understanding of women and how decisions were made about them over time . . . I know I had students who would come in and talk, students who weren't my staff or anything, but they would come into the Women's Center and they would often talk about the impact she had on their lives. She was at most of those events, and would often talk, or take a stand.

She talked very graphically at the "Breaking the Silence" event that we had around the time of the Anita Hill hearings. That was a tough time for women. This was often a Women's Center policy board strategy: when something national is going on like that, let's look at all the areas of our lives which it touches. People came to the Women's Center and watched the hearings live on television. Arlen Specter and the things he would say to Anita Hill, the questions he asked. And behind him were the interns, the Senate interns. We would see the looks on *their* faces with some of the questions. They could sit there for a certain amount of time, but then all of a sudden a question would come up or they would . . . the way the senators asked some of these things of the women, or of Clarence Thomas, or of any of these people who were witnesses, during the hearing—you could see this look of complete disbelief come over . . . Then the camera would pan away, and they'd come back to Arlen Specter again, and those people would be gone and there'd be a whole new set of interns behind him, because obviously their shocked expressions were not good publicity for what was going on in the Senate, the way the hearings were going. To blame her for being sexually harassed.

Women were riveted to these hearings. We schemed and talked, and Mink and Beatriz got together, and next thing you know, we decided to have "Breaking the Silence" about sexual harassment on campus. It was a very powerful, very powerful . . . We did it in

Classroom Unit II, that big classroom, and we collected stories of graduate students who were currently, or had been, undergoing sexual harassment on campus, who would not talk about it publicly because they felt their ability to continue in their field would be affected. They wrote some of their stories. They were changed enough not to be identifiable. Then undergraduates would read them. Very powerful . . . What women were undergoing in their fields, just trying to stay in their disciplines. Valerie Simmons, I believe, represented the Affirmative Action [office] at that time, and [talked in general about] some of what she heard, things that had gone on. Wendy Mink talked about her own experiences as a graduate student and then later. She was tenured at the time, and that was a very powerful thing. What I remember of that was it was so emotional for her that she asked us to hold the videotape and not . . . we videotaped it and we were . . . we had those for classroom use, or for other events at the center, and that was something that was very difficult for her to reveal, or to talk about, and she asked us not to be giving that tape out yet, and that she would let us know when she felt comfortable about that.

That was a very, very difficult time for everybody, because this was very real, and here it was going on on a national level, that it was “her word against his,” and it revived in a lot of women’s memory what it took to be a rape victim and be on the stand. And how it was your fault that you got raped. One way or another, no matter what it was, you ended up getting raped in the proceedings, in the jury trial, or by the police. In effect, you not only had to re-live the rape and all that trauma, but then your whole life was called into question in a way that often the perpetrator’s was never called into question. That’s why women were so reluctant to testify, and also so reluctant to bring up sexual harassment issues. So it really took a class action lawsuit to bring some change about on campus. And the work that Rita Walker did after that was just tremendous, in taking the law very seriously.

**Reti:** Oh, it's made a huge difference.

## **Student Advocates and Peer Educators on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault**

**Osborne:** Yes. A lot of students felt so much more supported, even just talking with her about their choices. At that time a lot was brought up about the sciences, which has since changed. There were women professors in the sciences who worked very hard, all those years, to try and make change there. And yet there were some areas that were particularly difficult, where students, undergraduate and graduate, felt very uncomfortable. Before I left I saw big change happening in those areas—big, big change. Rita [Walker] had something to do with some of that. Then we had a student who talked during that program “Breaking the Silence” about—and it wasn't quite sexual harassment, but this was a Title IX issue too—she stood up and said, “I was in class. I was the only woman in my class and had been the only woman for a year in my classes in that discipline.” She was in upper-division classes. She was an A student. She was doing very well. And at one point she asked a question. The TA turned to her and said, “Why don't you go home to your knitting, and just do some crocheting or something! You know you don't belong here.” And she just . . . She felt it was so hostile to even go back, because that was the tone of many of her classes. That was the most outspoken part of it, but the fact that when they were asked questions she would raise her hand and she was never called on. Or if she answered, her answer was picked apart and others were not. I mean, that kind of thing was going on in a number of disciplines. And so women did not feel comfortable.

So this was one of those issues that the Women's Center would tackle. What we could do was programs, or work within the various committees that were set up to bring up the issues, and do co-sponsored events to publicize that this needs to be addressed in some way, and have people talk on panels about how it could be addressed, and what were

the issues, and how did it affect numbers, and women's success as students, or faculty, or grad students, or staff? But it wasn't until that lawsuit that I saw major, major change happen.

And this brings us to SAPE, Student Advocates and Peer Educators on Sexual Harassment, which also came out of the resolution of that lawsuit. Students wanted to create it. I'm pretty sure the whole thing was a proposal that a student, Michal Kurlaender [came up with] in discussions with Beatriz and Wendy Mink. She wanted to do something on this issue, so she did a proposal, and I don't remember now where it had to go to. But it went to a number of places for approval, for funding to be set up as a campus program. There were questions about what peer advisors could and couldn't do. Was it confidential information? Were they mandated reporters? Was it not? Did they have to report instances of things like if a woman came in and said, "I was raped on campus or I was sexually harassed," would they have to report it? What were the levels of that sort of thing? Because if someone came and talked with me, there were certain instances in which I would have to . . . I was a mandated reporter, so I would have to caution people before they talked sometimes, in certain circumstances, especially if there was danger to other students, or a possibility that someone else might be raped, or whatever.

So anyway, she set up a program, and did a lot of research on how it could work. It was called Student Advocates and Peer Educators on Sexual Harassment. Then she set up the training for the students on the issues, on how to talk about the issue. She worked with Rita Walker. It was a joint program with the Title IX office and us. They ended up having office hours in Rita's office, and working with her. We did a lot of coaching with Michal, on how to do this and how to make it work. What were some other programs that happened? I believe there's still a whole notebook about it at the Women's Center, about what they set up, and some of the events that publicized it. Because the peer advisors

would also do events at different colleges so that students would be aware that the resource was there. Students could come in and talk through what was going on, and then the peer advisors would give them a range of options they had. The peer advisors did become confidential resources. So it was up to the student if they wanted to report it to Rita. Because Rita was a mandated reporter. She had to take action on the things she heard.

So students could come through and say, I'm not sure I want to talk about this, or I'm not sure this is sexual harassment, but let me tell you what happened. Let me tell you what's going on in my class, or in my dorm, or in my apartment, or at my college. They would run through it. Then the peer advisors would talk to them about the options. One of the options that a lot of students opted for was to write a letter to the offender. Because that was also a part of giving notice. (The first step in making a sexual harassment complaint was to notify the offender that their attention or actions were unwelcome.) So if they really wanted to take it somewhere later, they had taken the first step in terms of notifying someone that, "I want you to stop what you are doing," which is part of the Title IX sexual harassment procedure. You need to say, "This is unwanted. I don't want you to do this." So they would help them. They had sample letters. They would work it through with them, if that's what they wanted, if they wanted to try and do that first. If not, they could also work with Rita on a number of levels. It was great, and if you look in the notebook you'll see all the different levels of what they could and couldn't do, and suggestions on how to take action in a way that would work.

### **Nicolette Czarrunchick**

**Reti:** Okay, so we were starting to talk about Nicolette.

**Osborne:** Nicolette! Yes. Nicolette and I were in very similar positions for many years, in that we were both assistants who had a lot of responsibility, did a lot of work, and yet we

weren't the lead people, at least not in the eyes of the university. We worked, I would say, for the most part, very well with all of our bosses. Nicolette had a number of different bosses, as the board chairs changed. We both were the people who were responsible for making sure the receptions happened, the arrangements around a lot of the events. Beatriz and I did a lot of this very much in collaboration, back and forth. If it needed to be done, and one of us had the time and the energy, we were on it and the other one was on this part, or whatever. But often we would find that during events at the Women's Center, Feminist Studies FRA, or the women's studies senior thesis readings, or whatever, Nicolette and I would work together a lot on the set-up, the clean-up—whatever needed doing. I just loved working with her.

Nicolette was someone who, in spite of dealing with incredible demands, and the difficult, time-demanding work of a board assistant, would always stay calm. She meditated. I would say, "How do you stay so calm, Nicolette? I mean, all this is going on, this uproar and everything, and everything has to be done last minute. You have this search going on. These readings are happening. That's happening. All this stuff is happening at the same time. Everything is like, dropping in your lap at once. And yet you just keep plugging along and walking very calmly." And she said, "I meditate, and I try to think about the importance in the long run." (laughter)

So we often would have our own talks too, about being in the kind of position we were in, and how to empower students, how to empower other staff, or things we wanted to see happen. We had a lot of talks about working-class backgrounds and things like that. We had a number of students who worked on issues about being working class. They often would come to talk to Nicolette, or talk to me, or both of us, about those issues. I came from kind of a mixed working-class, aspiring-to-not-be-working-class background. I was the first in my family to graduate from a university, among my siblings. But my father, as part of the GI bill after the war, had gone to college. My mother, as many

women did, had gone for a little while and then quit to get married. But she was not allowed to go. It was against her father's wishes for her to go, and so she had to find her own money. And the money ran out, and she ended up getting married, and then my brother and sister and I all showed up, and went on from there. So she didn't finish school until much, much later, when she was in her fifties. So school was something my family aspired toward, but we were really a working-class family. It was kind of an anomaly for my dad to have been through. I always grew up wanting to be an engineer and do that kind of thing, but I also grew up in a time when at my school, even though I was in a college-bound program, we were told that as women we could be teachers, nurses, or secretaries. Those were our choices. So we were allowed to join the clubs for Future Nurses of America, Future Teachers of America, and we all had to take typing.

In my family it was always, "Make sure you've got the skills you need. Yeah, you want to go to college, but make sure you have the skills you need so you can always support your family if the guy leaves." Because that was just the way it was. It was very much a working-class family and background, even though we were aspiring, and the value was: reading was important, research was important. Everyone in my family was a reader, and self-education was very, very valued, and yet, you work and then you do this. You make sure that whatever you're training for is a job that will pay bucks. "Art. Anthropology. Writing. Don't count on it. Get that secretarial stuff down just in case. Make sure you know how to be a waitress. Make sure you've got these other things in place, and then you can go on." So we had a lot in common with a number of students who came through who were dealing with working-class issues. Hinano Campton was one. Bettina [Aptheker] did a lot of work with people on these issues. I remember a number of senior theses coming out on working-class issues. Nicolette was a very, very big support for students who were looking at these issues in their lives. Carol Whitehill was a counselor over at Kresge, and worked with a number of students on this also. She had done a Master's [thesis] on working-class issues, and a lot of the students ended up

with her as one of their resources, along with Nicolette and me and the other students who'd gone through that, especially the re-entry women coming in. The Re-entry Program with Corinne [Miller] and Christine King was a very powerful resource for the re-entry women, but Nicolette also was, in many ways. She knew how to get people to all the resources that they needed. She herself was going back to school at the time, working on her degree. She was taking classes every chance she could. So anyway, Nicolette just . . . When I think about being at the university, the first person I often think of is Nicolette, because of what we shared in work life. I don't know what else to say. I mean, Nicolette was there for everything. When she was on our different committees or boards she worked—to exhaustion, sometimes I think. I don't remember all the details. I just remember Nicolette and me cleaning up the Women's Center, putting chairs back, and just talking through issues. We would just throw ideas back and forth, or talk through things.

**Reti:** Well, when we talk about the connections between women's studies and the Women's Center, it's really easy to get lost in these kind of institutional conceptions, when it really comes down to: well, there was Nicolette, and there was Arlyn, and they were doing all of this work together. And that's how these alliances really get made.

**Osborne:** Exactly. (laughter) And a lot of the supporting of the students . . . She and I would talk through, "I sent them here. Where did you send them? How do you think we can get them through this or that, or whatever? Did they sign up for that class that we were encouraging them to take? Did they finally get a tenured faculty member in . . . Are they bold enough now . . ." She's a very, very integral part of the Women's Center. I think a lot of students thought she was part of the Women's Center, as well as women's studies, because she was always there or at women's studies. We kind of traveled together.



## Marge Frantz

**Reti:** So who should we talk about next, Marge Frantz?

**Osborne:** Yes, another person just like that! (laughter) We talked a little bit about Marge and what she said about [political organizing]. Marge was on committees over and over and over again, and always looking at the practical— let's not forget the working-class women; let's not forget the staff—even though it's difficult to do staff issues. There wasn't funding for staff programming. She often came up with the ways. Marge also had the most amazing contacts with people. When we wanted to bring a speaker, she often was friends with them, or knew someone who was a friend. Students would really connect with her, also. We just waited for the times when she would do her radical women classes, *Radical Women of the Sixties*, and talk about them. Then we often would have associated discussions at the Women's Center, or show films: *Berkeley in the Sixties*, or *Seeing Red*. You remember *Seeing Red*?<sup>24</sup>

**Reti:** I sure do.

**Osborne:** Marge was in that. So those were really big things. Students would see Marge in the film, and then they would meet her, and they were like, "Oh, she's really approachable." She was kind of an entrée for a lot of students, especially re-entry women, to see the women faculty, and Marge was a lecturer, not faculty, which . . . was always hard for me, because I think the level of work she did was often faculty level. But she chose to be there, on the front lines. She had gone back to school to get her degree, to get her graduate degree. She would talk in very clear terms about what it meant to be a graduate student. She talked me out of being a graduate student at one point. She said, "I don't want to burst your bubble, but you're not going to do your own research. So if what you're telling me is that is what you are passionate about, you might want to think

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<sup>24</sup>. James Klein and Julia Reichert, *Seeing Red: Stories of American Communists* (New Day Films, 1984).

very carefully about going into Hist Con [History of Consciousness],” which is where I wanted to apply. It wasn’t about Hist Con. It was just about being a graduate student, and what happens with your research at that time. It’s not always a straight-line path that you can do your research and go through it. It has to go through committees and all of that. So she would talk through that with a lot of students, and really supported a lot of graduate students. Do you know what I mean? Just sitting with them and talking through: how do you get through this? How do you make choices here and there? Who might you want on your committee? She was very wise and very accessible, I think to the point of exhaustion. How many times did she threaten to retire? She’s in her eighties. And she kept coming back. Is she still around, or did she move?

**Reti:** No, she still lives in Santa Cruz.

**Osborne:** Is she still teaching?

**Reti:** No, she’s not still teaching, but it was only a couple of years ago that she stopped.

**Osborne:** But she kept saying, “I’m not going to teach,” and we’d be getting ready to have her goodbye dinner. Then she’d say, “Well, I’m coming back for one more class.” “Oh, Marge!” (laughter) I think she was in her early eighties when I left. She just kept coming back: one more class. She loves students.

**Reti:** They loved her oral history class.

**Osborne:** Yes, a lot of our students who were considering oral history, or designing their own major, it was kind of this thing where Nicolette, or I, or any of us would be referring them to resources. And one of them was, “Talk to Marge if you get a chance, if you can.” They often wanted to make Marge their advisor, and that was difficult, because she had so many people she worked with, and she was a lecturer. She kind of became an *ex officio*, or whatever you call it, advisor, for so many students. I don’t know how she managed to

pull all of that off, because it was a tremendous amount of work and time that she put into things. And she would show up at the policy board meetings and then have to drive in bad weather all the way back up to Ben Lomond. She'd call Eleanor and say, "I'm going home. Eleanor needs me tonight." That was very sweet.

## **The Women of Color Film Festival**

**Reti:** Okay, let's talk about the Women of Color Film Festival.

**Osborne:** I believe that was one of the most educational, mind-blowing, atmosphere-changing things that came up on campus, in many ways. Margaret Daniel was the graduate student who was the founder of this, and then turned it over to other women who went on with it. I think she did it for about three or four years before she had to go off and do research on her dissertation. It was so painful, I think, for her to let it go, because this was a beautiful thing. It was always in conjunction with Kresge . . . I believe she did it as part of the Feminist Studies FRA. But it was always co-sponsored, cross-campus, boards of study getting involved to help fund it, one of those things where you put together the money every way you can. And putting together films, many of which came from Women Make Movies, the distribution company. She brought films in that people didn't even know existed. Women filmmakers not getting the funding to do the films. Women filmmakers' films not being carried by major companies. It just goes on and on and on. So she also would bring in the filmmakers, along with the films. For me that was amazing, to hear about their process, what they were trying to do in the films, and how they set it up, and what they were trying to portray. Some of them were art-type films, and some were documentaries. The mix of films was stunning. And often she would have a theme running through each festival, or running through sections of the film festival. It was done as a collaborative effort. It wasn't just Margaret doing it. Marty Wollesen would be involved. Other graduate students, undergraduates would want to be involved. Finding funding for it. We would work with Margaret. Marty would work

with Margaret. We'd go out, not just on campus, but out into the community and get funding for it. It was very, very popular. It was almost like everything stopped when those film festivals went on.

**Reti:** I remember that. You would just go and do that.

**Osborne:** That's *all* we did, is go and see the films. We'd go in on a Friday evening. I think actually there were receptions on Thursday to greet some of the filmmakers, and then there was like half of Friday and well into the night, and Saturday all day, and then sometimes well into the night, and then Sunday as long as anybody could even keep their eyes open!

**Reti:** (laughter)

**Osborne:** Yet every film was stunning, and exciting, and groundbreaking, and nobody wanted to leave. Then there were more receptions. Receptions at Kresge Town Hall, or receptions at the provost's house. Carolyn Martin-Shaw, I believe was the provost at the time we started, and we would always be at her house doing a reception. That was often the Women's Center's contribution, the reception part. And then Nicolette and I would be there, along with students, (laughter) setting things up and cleaning up.

And students having the chance to talk with filmmakers. I often wonder what part that played in some of the film, or multimedia, or video studies that were developed for students as majors here. I don't know. But I certainly know students took advantage of those programs because of stuff they saw here, and excitement they got about the videography and the editing possible, how to get your message across in this way, and how powerful it was. And they would often show films that we would bring back later, or rent, because they had such an impact. If we had a theme at the Women's Center we often had a film series as a part of that, especially in the spring. Often people were so busy in the spring that all they had time for was to kind of blitz out and watch a film.

And yet we could do a film series, and have a little discussion afterwards, and students would really enjoy that, just come and get into that.

So Margaret was groundbreaking, I think, in many ways. This was one of those things that impacted so many people on so many levels. I know when I was up at Kresge it was still happening, and I was still advocating, even as a residential life coordinator, up there for the Activities Office to still stay involved with that. Because it changed lives every single time. And it was a way that students who didn't understand some issues . . . Like, I remember one video one year by a Korean-American filmmaker who was looking at domestic violence among Korean immigrant women. We later used it in a program, as I remember. We got the film and had her also speak in a program. It was revealing what it is to be an immigrant in a country, a Korean woman, not have the full language skills, and [experience] domestic violence for years and try to be taken seriously, even go somewhere outside of the family, or outside of your community for help. What that meant within the community, outside the community.

Just the levels of what came through in these films that touched students. People came up from the community for these all the time. The level of how it touched other women, about the issues that go across any of these boundaries. It sparked many senior theses and things like that. That's just one example of one of the films. The filmmaker, I remember, had the woman speak. And I seem to remember that one of the women who spoke was her mother. I don't remember for sure. There was a often a panel after the films to talk about the film.

**Reti:** I remember those panel discussions would often be intense and emotional.

**Osborne:** The whole audience would get involved, and the questions that came up . . . I mean, it was almost like, we don't want to move on to the next film yet because we're just burned here, and yeah, we know the next one's going to be an experience again.

**Reti:** Yeah, it was fantastic.

**Osborne:** It was. The set-up of that was just amazing, on all levels.

Actually that brings up something which is very interesting. Because of the level of cooperation and co-sponsorship that happened, sometimes people weren't sure who was putting on the event. Was it the Women's Center; was it Feminist Studies FRA; was it women's studies; was it Kresge; was it Porter; was it the art board? Where was it coming from . . . theater arts? So many people came together, because these issues were touching all of these disciplines, and co-sponsorships from community organizations for a lot of it. I don't know if . . . This is just speculation, but George Ow's Pacific Rim Film Festival, I often wonder if it was sparked by the Women of Color Film Festival. There was a whole time period where these film festivals were just blossoming. So anyway, who else should we talk about?

### **Francisco Alarcón**

**Reti:** Francisco Alarcón. I know we talked a little bit yesterday about how you were on the phone with him during the Loma Prieta earthquake.

**Osborne:** Yes. I also had the experience of Beatriz, and myself, and Francisco Alarcón, and Adrienne Rich, and Lucille [des Jardins] and a good friend of Lucille's, Connie, all doing Spanish lessons together. And Francisco translating Adrienne's poetry into Spanish, and Adrienne translating Francisco's Spanish poetry into English. It was a period of time when we got together for a little while and . . . This was the kind of stuff that I took away from the Women's Center. There's just no way I would have had these kinds of experiences without someone like Beatriz, without Adrienne being connected to the Women's Center. Michelle Cliff was often there. I remember part of the time she was on the East Coast teaching at a university when we were doing this, but she came back at

one point. And oh, it was just an amazing experience to have these kinds of collections of people get together for some reason!

**Reti:** So how exactly was Francisco involved with the Women's Center?

**Osborne:** Well, Francisco was doing Spanish for Spanish Speakers, along with Elba Sanchez, who also was very involved with the center for years. There were a couple of ties. One was a Chicano and Latino staff group that sometimes would meet for lunch at the Women's Center, or have meetings there. Many of the staff groups that were for underrepresented staff met at the center. He and Elba were good friends of Beatriz's. Both were always coming up with ideas. Francisco was one of those people who . . . you get into a group of people and start talking ideas, he was always coming up with something. A lot of the students he worked with were also doing things at the Women's Center. Elba [Sanchez] was working with the students who were doing *Las Mujeres*. And we did joint events. Some of the students were also our work study students. Pilar Aguerro published some of her art work in the magazine. Students would sometimes be putting things together there. Elba worked long, long hours on that. We were helping students write grants for funding. I mean, it was . . . I'd like to say it was all in neat packages, but it wasn't. Beatriz and Francisco and Elba were good friends.

**Reti:** That's how things happen.

**Osborne:** Elba and the *Las Mujeres* students would do readings at the Women's Center. And later Francisco would do readings there also. He was a very strong feminist, and in many ways was a role model for a lot of male students in terms of how to be a feminist, and also how to express yourself, how to be a writer, even if you also had to be a teacher to survive. I don't know if you've ever seen his children's books

**Reti:** I have not. I would love to see them.

**Osborne:** Oh! They're beautiful. He's working with an artist from the San Francisco area. I've actually bought all of them: *Iguanas in the Snow* and . . . They're very seasonal, and it's poetry. They have beautiful illustrations, and it's in English and in Spanish, so I gave three or four of them to my niece and nephew. The nephew wanted to learn Spanish. They were adopted, and wanted to understand their heritage, their background. It just opened worlds to them, of not just their language, but the cultural levels that go beyond that, because the art work and the words . . . He's talking about things as simple as watching his grandmother baking, and what his *abuela* does. She bakes, and it's not just baking. It's more than that. It's the whole world that goes with it. It's your family, your heritage, your culture, everything. Oh, it's just a beautiful book.

### Dolores Huerta

**Reti:** You mentioned that Dolores Huerta had come to the center quite a few times.

**Osborne:** Yes, and I don't know all the beginning connections. I know that Beatriz developed a relationship with her, and brought Dolores to speak on current issues. Well, you probably remember this: a lot of the propositions that were being put out in California were English language only. And again, Francisco got involved. We got involved. Everybody would get together to discuss these issues. It was a political thing, which meant as a unit we could not take a stance, but we certainly could bring up the issues, and talk about what would be the impacts, and have different panelists come and speak.<sup>25</sup> And Dolores Huerta would come, and we would have panels of Dolores and farm workers, and I think Cesar Chavez came at least once. To bring Dolores was a very important part. A lot of the work that Dolores Huerta did with the farm workers, the credit for it in the media went to Cesar Chavez, and yet I know he couldn't have done all

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<sup>25</sup> Osborne was most likely referring to Proposition 209, the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI). The CCRI, which won a majority vote in 1996 referendum, banned the use of race and gender preferences in state university admissions, employment, and contracting. In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 227, which required that all public school instruction be conducted in English.



that he did without that amount of work that she did, and the kind of work she did, and the kind of people she would put together, and her perspective as a teacher and as an educator. He gave her credit, even if the media saw her as invisible at times. And so that's a woman's issue. And it's an activist issue. In many activist movements women are doing a whole lot of the work, and yet the men are the ones [who are visible]. Often women in movements are not treated well. Now, I'm not saying that happened with Dolores. I don't know all of the details of that, so I won't speak to that. We also felt it was very important for Dolores to be recognized for what she did. We would co-sponsor things with Rosie Cabrera up in EOP and many of the SAA/EOP staff. (It's no longer SAA/EOP. I know it's just called EOP now.) But the students who worked there, or the students who got support there from the advisors, were often students who were also working at the Women's Center, and again, they would bring up projects, and again we would all be pooling money, and resources, and advising, and everything to make things happen. Some of the students would go down and volunteer with the farm workers, and Dolores became a mentor to a number of the students. Also, she never backed off about the importance of education, and the importance of thinking really carefully about all of the issues.

So when I was at Oakes as a preceptor, and we were talking about being in Dorm H. Sandra Calderon and Ty Hardaway were my first NA's, they called them, not RA's but NA's. And they were like, "We hate the name Dorm H." I said, "Well, maybe we could name it after someone. Even if we just do it within the dorm, but maybe it's something we could consider. Do you know anybody you really admire whose name starts with H?" And the first name that came up was Dolores Huerta.

**Reti:** That's perfect. It was meant to be.

**Osborne:** Yes, so there was this big co-sponsored event. When we dedicated the dorm to her, students and their families came, many of them local families. Many of them also

drove up from LA, because many of the students came from LA. And many of them had been farm workers, and they were in tears at the thought that their children were living in a dorm dedicated to Dolores Huerta, that they got to meet her. She had meant so much to them. And the Women's Center was part of this; Oakes was part of this; College Eight was part of this. There were propositions that had affected people at the time. I mean, just so many issues were coming together at that time, and it was such an issue for a lot of students about access to the university, about how to afford to come here. So this was a fluid flow around campus, of just making sure these students . . . and many of the faculty too, like Elba and Francisco and Aida Hurtado and Pat Zavella. Alex Reveles, a staff member, was also a great support for many students on campus, and was one of our volunteers. So all of this. And then discussions among all of these people went into the Chicano Pipeline, which Beatriz and others had got established before she left. I'd like to say the Women's Center did all of this, but it's all part of . . . it's integrated into everything.

**Reti:** It's a thread that goes through the tapestry of the campus.

**Osborne:** Yes, and even Francisco Hernandez. I wasn't aware of it at first, but Francisco Hernandez had worked with the farm workers as an intern, so when Dolores came up to dedicate our dorm, and speaking, and the Women's Center co-sponsorship, and all of this stuff going on, he and Dolores got to meet and talk a little bit about his time working for the farm workers union. It's an amazing set of connections that happen. Once they're set up, it's almost like students hit this safety net, or this support. And many times that's what it's about, networking, getting to know people that then open up doors, and ideas, and thoughts and things that could be part of your future, a way to pick up skills, or pick up knowledge, or maybe something you never thought of for a senior thesis, or a Master's thesis, or a dissertation. Or just inspiring other kids to come to school, and not give up on that dream, and also make them feel supported. It was a real risk for many

parents to send their kids off to a university. Knowing that these people were there for them, and that there was a tie to what they were familiar with in this very strange place here, was very, very nice. And Dolores Huerta was a part of that.

## **Other Key Figures and Organizations**

**Reti:** Okay. What about Michael Cowan?

**Osborne:** He was part of the Sexual Harassment Education Committee, but he was also the dean of humanities at one point. He was always very, very supportive of the Women's Center. He worked with Beatriz on a number of things. He worked with Wendy Mink and the Committee on the Status of Women. He, and there were a number of male faculty who did this, really understood women's issues, really was supportive in looking at the university and their position within the university, and how they could also support and advance the role of women. I ended up with tremendous respect for him and a number of other men on campus in what they would do.

**Reti:** It's important to know who the supporters have been. I know he's been supportive in so many ways.

We talked about Kresge a little bit yesterday. Did you have more to say about that?

**Osborne:** I make it sound like Kresge was our main sponsorship, but the provosts, even Ellen Suckiel, who I don't remember defining herself as a feminist . . . We did some programs with her. She talked about women and economics. A dynamite program. I don't believe she always agreed, or had the same values of what the Women's Center was working on at the time, [but] there were ties, because women's issues tie across. And she was very supportive as the provost of Kresge in many ways. That was in the very early days when I was first there, as I remember. Because after her, I think Helene [Moglen] was provost again, and then Carolyn Martin-Shaw (who was Carolyn Clark at

the time) and then Paul Skenazy later, who was also very supportive. But that was as I was leaving the Women's Center. The Kresge provosts have a very strong record of being supportive of the Women's Center.

**Reti:** And women's studies is housed at Kresge.

**Osborne:** Yes. But that didn't mean they had to be supportive. (laughter) I think it speaks to the kind of people who were provosts of Kresge over the years. But many other colleges were always involved. I don't want to sound like it was exclusively [Kresge], by any means. The provosts of many colleges. We did a lot of work with Merrill. The provost's house at Merrill College. John Isbister, Roz Spafford, Wally Goldfrank [College Eight], Kathy Foley [Porter College]. Many, many events over there. And also with Cowell.

We would often use the provosts' houses for events because it was a comfortable venue. It tied it in with the college. It was accessible to students. It was a beautiful environment for receptions, and bringing an honored speaker to talk in a more intimate way with students, staff, faculty, and community people. So they were wonderful places to have Women's Center events. Which speaks to the Women's Center itself. When we still had the chimney in the living room, the center was not the biggest area for a reception. And sometimes we needed to look in other areas to make it more accessible. So just as we often said that women's issues didn't stop at the Women's Center—utilizing the provosts' houses tied in many other things, and made the Women's Center [visible] throughout campus, throughout the community.

Which also reminds me of something I wanted to bring up yesterday, which was that we worked for years with Kuumbwa, and then later with Palookaville when it first started. Kuumbwa was always very good at working with us on events. If we were co-sponsoring something with Lea Lawson . . . That was years and years ago. I don't

remember if Holly Near and Ronnie Gilbert were here before that at the Civic Auditorium. I don't remember all the connections, but somehow we always ended up co-sponsoring something with someone somewhere, even in the community. We worked with Palookaville when I first came. I remember working with Ellen Farmer and Coleen Douglas, and anthropology graduate student Kamari Clarke to bring Ase Drumming Circle. We had drumming groups there and it was a fundraiser for something. Everything was a fundraiser for something! (laughter) The community was very, very supportive, over and over again, of the Women's Center and women's issues, and women performers and women artists, and women in film, and women in all levels. George Ow, others, contributed to many of the events, whether they were ours, or we were one of the other co-sponsors. But like I said, it all would get mixed up about who was really running it. You know? It was like: it was an event about women and so we all went in and did it together. Crossing Press was another group that we worked with. I'm sure you remember HerBooks being involved in a few things. (laughter)

**Reti:** (laughter)

**Osborne:** I remember your reading of the *Kindertransport* book at the center.<sup>26</sup> Things like that were community-campus crossings. And often for Women's Center events we'd be going out asking for donations from various businesses in the community. Always very supportive. The Bagelry. I can't tell you how many bagels The Bagelry donated over time. We worked in conjunction with *Matrix* for a long time, the women's newsmagazine.

**Reti:** Oh, of course. That was the organ of the feminist movement in Santa Cruz for so many years.

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<sup>26</sup> Irene Reti is the publisher of HerBooks feminist press, established in Santa Cruz in 1984. The book Osborne is referring to is *A Transported Life: Memories of Kindertransport, the Oral History of Thea Feliks Eden*, edited by Irene Reti and Valerie Jean Chase and published in 1995.

**Osborne:** Yes. So the Women's Health Center, *Matrix*—the women's organizations in Santa Cruz always . . . And then when the Walnut Avenue Women's Center started, I remember arranging to have events there, and arranging the childcare there at the same time, and we'd have our work study students working with the childcare, or volunteering with the childcare for events that we did together.

**Reti:** You and the Walnut Avenue Women's Center?

**Osborne:** Yes, in the very early days. And before that it was the YWCA [in the same location] and we did some co-sponsorship with them.

I just wanted to say a little bit more about some of the Women's Music Festivals. I think the third one was in many ways the pinnacle of our success with music festivals. We had a big program with a tremendous number of community supporters. I remember many of us laboring over the program for hours, because people paid for little advertisements in it, which helped to pay for publishing the program. It didn't help a lot with the music festival because the cost of doing something like that was so high. But Pele Juju, as a young band, a budding band, was there. June Millington came. She was one of our headliners. And if I remember right, she gave us a good rate, or she donated her time for that very first one. Things like that. People like Jeanne Houston doing events with us, doing readings. People from the community came up to do things. It just blew my mind, the amount of support that women in the community and businesses gave to the Women's Center over the years.

### **Greatest Rewards and Challenges**

**Reti:** Tell me what your greatest challenge was in working with the Women's Center.

**Osborne:** Well, there was a work-related one, and a personal one. The work-related one was the registration fee committee work, because we deeply felt it was important to be

accountable to students for their money. And the amount of time it took every year. We prepared for it all year by counting how many people came to each of our programs: how many were community; how many were students; how many were staff; how many were faculty? There was a long, long documentation process that we went through constantly throughout the year. Then pulling it all together, looking at highlights, and looking at who was on the committee, and what might be what they cared about, so that we could tie in, because often they had no idea about women's issues. So tying in with what they might care about. Because we wanted to be funded every year. Then getting a presentation together, and practicing it, and then having the committee come, and making sure that all of our financial books were open to them, that anything they needed was there, that we could do an efficient, succinct, and at the same time very effective presentation. Then we'd sit and wait, and worry about whether we were going to be funded. And a couple of times the vice chancellor would step in and say, "You say you're not going to fund them, but yes, you are." Because it was an issue of affirmative action and that sort of thing. And it just depended on the students and what their priorities were, whoever was the chair of the committee, and the committee itself. So it was a wonderful time to give that presentation, partly because it gave us a chance to do what this oral history does, to look at the highlights of that year and what our mission was and how well we'd done with it, and then communicate with students. A lot of the students on the committees were great. But then it was also that constantly having to watch how you programmed. If  $x$  number of programs wasn't the right percentage in attendance to justify the funding, we then had to go out and do some more fundraising in the community, because maybe more community women were attracted to one program than another. Were we pulling in enough students? What could we do to make sure that we were being really accountable for all of that funding, that students got the services they paid for? That was very critical to us. I think it was also mind-opening to the students on how much the community gave to them, or brought to them, or made

possible for them. So we saw this as an educational thing as well. And that's where anything we did for staff had to be completely out of donations, or completely paid for by staff, and it was a real question about whether we could use the Women's Center for it, because registration fees paid for the building. After a certain period of time we were responsible for that, for the charging back of all of those services from the university to the Women's Center. And a lot of those came out of the registration fee budget. So that kind of thing was a real challenge.

Once we got to the point where that funding was pretty well guaranteed and it wasn't being reviewed every single year in the same way, then it freed up an amazing amount of time to go back to doing services for students. It was a service to do that for students, and I think it was a very important experience for them to be looking at funding, and how to spend their own money, and make sure they are accountable to each other and to what they wanted to accomplish on campus. But that was a tough thing every year. It was kind of like: whoa, now we have to do the registration fee presentation and pull it all together and make sure all went well. Worrying about things like how would bringing erotic dancers affect funding, (laughter) and it did. And then if we get cuts, how would we deal with that? And sometimes they would make stipulations on how they wanted us to spend money, and we had to pay attention to that. We were staff, but we were employed by the students, is the way we saw it. And jointly by the community, which was something students didn't always understand. So that was a real interesting part of it. That was a challenge.

The personal challenge was that I came out of industry. I came out of a number of disciplines. I had always done women's work on the side as a volunteer. So it was like I'd died and gone to heaven to get paid to do this. To get paid to talk with women! To get paid to put on these programs, to strategize about advancing women somehow. I mean, to hang out with these people, to talk and work with these people. What a treasure. And



yet, I also personally was an introvert. And so it was difficult for me to be in receptions. One-to-one was very easy. That was not a problem, and I'd done a lot of women's work that way. I'd already been a teacher at the community college. That was not hard, to lead a program, or run something, to get up in front of a bunch of people. But to talk one-to-one in a reception was excruciatingly painful, because you didn't have whole conversations. So I had to learn how to start to say something, have an interruption, turn to someone else. I mean, I was working class. I didn't do this kind of stuff! Social stuff was not what we did. We went to work. We came home. We did more work. We went to school at night. We went to bed, got up, and started it all again the next day. It was not that kind of work. So that was a very difficult thing for me.

I'm trying to remember who it was who did this for me. It was a personal friend. She gave me a pin that . . . it was like a little person, but it was cut out of flat metal. It had hands splayed on either side of its head, and it was actually kind of an archetypal figure, and it had a little green stone in the middle. So it looked like a really nice thing to wear on my nice clothes when I was at receptions. But it also, if you looked at it closely, this rendition of this archetypal figure also looked like someone was putting their fingers in their ears, and wiggling them, and sticking their tongue out and saying, "This really doesn't matter." She said, "Look at this. Wear this. And remember that in the big scheme of things it really doesn't matter . . . just kind of do a raspberry at having to do a reception. Because you know you love the people. You know you want to talk to them. It's just learning the skills and being bold enough and brave enough to go out there and move person to person." Often what I would do, because it was so uncomfortable for me, was just get really busy in the kitchen, or cleaning or whatever. Sometimes Beatriz would get very frustrated. "Arlyn! You're supposed to be out there introducing students to people." I'd be like, well . . . I'd stand next to somebody and try to get their attention. I didn't know how to do it. And so I had to learn that skill. It is a skill. I found that as an introverted and working-class person, this was a big thing to learn.

Beatriz and I at one point worked with Women in Management, and one of the things we did at a Women in Management meeting was to go through a Myers-Briggs test. We learned that we both scored the same, except that she was extroverted and I was introverted. We ended being an example or something of how close you could be and yet, how do you then work together? [The workshop leader] said, "Here's what it would look like." And I'll never forget just starting to laugh so hard. She said, "Here's what it would look like. You, Beatriz, you might get really excited about something, and you're talking out loud, and the more excited you get, the louder you're talking, the more your arms will wave around. And the more excited you get, the more Arlyn will start backing up to the wall and saying, 'I need to shut the door for a minute. Let me go think about this. Give me a little time.' And she can't give you an answer. So the more you want an answer the less she's going to be able to give it to you, because that's just her personality." Then she described how frustrated Bea would get when I would go silent while thinking and not give her an answer for a while.

It was amazing. Bea and I went back to the office afterwards, and we started talking about it, and we were laughing about it. It made our working relationship so much better when we understood how we worked, and then we were just like, *on*. Because we understood why we worked so well together, but we also understood what was difficult about it. And it was that I'm an introvert. I *was*. I've learned, really. I've worked very hard on it. I was very introverted. That's a tough position to be in when you're dealing with so many people all day. I would be exhausted after one meeting, even if it was just a meeting of a task force on something. And learning to do three, four, five meetings a day, and a reception at the end, and work on a presentation, working with students and advising them, and supervising them, and whatever had to go on, and try to make it all work. That was a real challenge for me. Because you were all things to all people at the Women's Center, because it was women's work, and that's the way women are often viewed in society. Nicolette and I would sometimes laugh about this. "Well, we pick up

all the pieces for everybody. It's like picking up dirty underwear after people go through." I felt like the work I did at home just tied right in. (laughter) I took care of kids, and cleaned up the house, and cleaned up the Women's Center, and cleaned up after everything that happened, whether it was political clean-up or typing up reports or whatever. It's women's work, making sure those connections are made. Hinano often called it braiding. She really loved the image of braiding. Or roots, the roots twining with each other. She often drew pictures. She did a picture of a tree with women in the roots for the Celebrating Women conference. It was absolutely beautiful. And then she colored them all by hand. I mean, that was the kind of care that went into stuff. Women loved the Women's Center, and loved having a place where they felt safe to be who they were and not have to be what they thought the world wanted, which was things like you looking a certain way, a certain weight, a certain body image, a certain kind of scholarship, a certain kind of whatever. The Women's Center was a place they could just be whoever they wanted. And they could be what the German interns brought in, which was . . .

### **The "German Interns"**

The German interns. I say that and they just . . . Karin Stemmer, who was one of them, still says, "Oh, I can't believe you lumped us all together into 'the German interns.' We were all individual people." (laughter) She was right. I got a call from Germany saying, "I am a social work student in what you would call a Master's program. For us it's kind of like a doctoral program. I want the experience (this was in broken English) of learning at the university, and I understand you're a Women's Center." We had this long conversation about, well, we're not a women's center that does domestic violence issues. We touch on those, and we educate on those, and we have calls around that, but we then channel into the correct resources in the community. Karin, for instance, was looking at multigenerational housing issues, and how that would work, and childcare issues, and

working-class issues for women. Because she was a working-class, re-entry woman in the university, which . . . going to the university in Germany, that was really new. That was groundbreaking. They'd been attracted by the names of who was here—Angela Davis and Bettina Aptheker—and on and on. The names they had read. Lucille Clifton, and boy, were they in pain that she wasn't here anymore. And they knew that Adrienne Rich lived in this area, or somewhere near here, and spoke here, and they wanted to come. So we had these long talks about how would this benefit the center? Could we do it? We had to work out would they take any work study jobs, which we didn't want to have happen. They couldn't be paid. How were they going to manage?

**Reti:** To just come live here and do an internship.

**Osborne:** And they pulled it off. We pulled it off. They pulled it off and a dimension got added to the Women's Center. I know that they also brought a lot of that in their work that they did in feminist studies, or women's studies, because they would take classes, and they would be in the classes with the students. It was not exactly something in the program. We had to really work with International Programs, with various deans and board chairs, for them to even take classes, or get credit. Could they get credit? It went on and on and on. And yet they provided a dimension and an exchange of information similar to what WILPF would bring to a number of the things that we co-sponsored. It was an international part of this. Jacquelyn Marie was very involved in that. Women's issues are world-wide on many levels, especially economic, the childcare, the work issues, the access issues, health issues. And then how can we bring this dialogue here, from the community through the university, and make change?<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In written comments on the transcript of this interview Arlyn added that "German interns" Karin and Krystal also started the Pink Café at the Women's Center, a drop-in place 'to relax and meet people in an informal and friendly environment.' They always insisted the Women's Center be beautiful inside, with flowers and other aesthetic touches.

So let's see. Why did I leave?

### **Leaving the Women's Center and Moving On**

Well, Beatriz went off to Harvard for a program in public administration, and then later to England with Annie Valva. I was the interim director, and it got extended a little bit, and it went for over a year, and then there was a search for a new director, because Beatriz did decide to resign. For a while she was on leave, and then she ended up leaving. She went off and worked with Feminist Majority, and on and on and on. She worked with so many groups. I don't remember exactly what she was doing during that time. But she felt it was time to move on, and was very involved in politics, and was working with Dolores Huerta and other people, and the Feminist Majority. So anyway, she left on leave, and then I became the interim director for a period of time. So when Beatriz ended her leave and there was a search for a director, my understanding was that what a lot of the search committee wanted was an academic, if they could get it, an academic teaching kind of position. So there was a lot of discussion about that, about what would be happening and what they wanted. There was a point where, because I wanted to apply for it I had to back away from knowing what went on. Though I did end up having to give tours of the Women's Center to all of the candidates. (laughter) It was a fascinating sort of process to be in: "Oh, you're applying too." Because applicants' names were out there when it came time to do the public presentations.

I wasn't hired for the position, but I stayed on because I felt continuity was very important. I worked with Shane [Snowdon] for a year, and then after a while felt, well, where do I want to go after this? I had a lot of different disciplines in my past. I felt like the center had moved on well and was transitioning well, and it was time to look for what *I* was going to do. When Bea had gone on leave initially, I had been planning to take a leave. It was all set up. I was going to take a leave and go learn about residential issues. I'd been a preceptor. I loved working in the residence halls and bringing that kind

of mentorship to students, developing students in that way. I had been getting ready to sit in for Adrienne Waite over at Cowell while she was on maternity leave. I think it was the day before I was going to start that I got pulled back because something happened for Bea, and she was going to be leaving. I can't remember what all happened, but something happened where I got pulled back to the Women's Center last minute. I felt like I really left Adrienne in the lurch there. She handled it very well. She's a wonderful person, and I worked very closely with her as a Residential Life Coordinator. But I ended up being back at the center doing that work.

So I thought, well what about residential stuff? So I started applying for positions in residential and housing and activities, because this was all stuff I could do, but then it would be out in the colleges. And that would be fun, to work from that perspective. I got the job at Kresge [College] and stayed there for about five years, and then moved on when I wanted to retire. It was probably burnout. We went through so many changes at Kresge over that time, with retirements, and things like that. I had a wonderful staff there, and some of them are still there and doing very well. I worked with some great students. And yet it was also time in my life where I wanted to be able to write. I had a granddaughter. I wanted to spend time with her. I was working really long hours, because that's what residential life took, especially because at the time I was there a number of positions went unfilled during certain times, and there were hirings. It felt like constant hirings, which is the life of staff at the university sometimes. But I would have to be sitting in, doing portions of various positions, plus some of my staff having to go out and having to have interim staff in, and do training. I was exhausted.

When I looked at the possibilities in my life, and where I wanted to go next, it was about writing. So I ended up opting for early retirement. My mother and I sold our house. The kids were not real happy about this. But moving to an area where I could afford to live on much less money and write for a full year was the most amazing experience of my

life. The gains I made in the craft of writing over that time were just amazing. Then finances caught up, and I had to go back to work.

When I did start doing work, amazingly, I saw in the newspaper a job for a data analyst at a women's crisis center in Calaveras County. So I went up and applied for it. I brought a lot of background and a lot of experience, but I was also very clear about what I would and wouldn't do. I did not want to do direct services. I really wanted to keep my focus in my life on my writing. I was very clear work would not go home with me mentally, therefore I would not do direct services. And I couldn't believe it. When I was in the interview, I saw this sigh of relief around the room as I said that. I was just very up front. "I will not do direct services. If that's what you want, I'm not the right person for this position. I will do your computer work. I'll do your data collection. I'll do your databases. Whatever you want there. I'll help you with the grant reports. All of that. That's fine. Easy for me. But I will not do direct services, because I don't feel the two mix very well. In my experience, when you are doing one and the other, direct service will win out, and data goes crying, because you don't have the time for it, and that's the kind of thing you can't skimp on if you're reporting to your funders." And they were just like, "Oh, thank God." (laughter) So I got snapped up very quickly. It doesn't pay much. That area is a very depressed area, especially in the work area, so it doesn't pay much. But for me it was easy, because it was work I'd done. They needed people who had computer skills very much, and already knew, so they didn't have to train, women's issues and what was important. What kind of numbers to count, how to look at reports, and that kind of thing. So they were thrilled. So I worked at Calaveras for about a year.

And then something opened up for that kind of position at Mountain Women's Resource Center, which is where I am now, in Sonora. It was only three miles from my house. The drive to Calaveras was about an hour, sometimes through valley fog . . . it's two-lane highways. Lots of accidents, lots of head-ons.

During that time I also got involved, just before I got the job at Calaveras, I . . . typically for me, a woman going into non-traditional men's fields, here I am in my fifties and I'm walking into a store one day, and there are these very young firefighters up front handing out flyers. I see them whispering and nudging each other as I'm walking up. I'm like, "What is this?" And they're like, "Here. Would you like to be a firefighter?" I'm looking at them and I'm thinking, you know, I *do* have a lot of gray hair. It is very obvious, my age. I'm going, uh huh, they think it's funny to hand this to me. "Okay, well thank you." I took the flyer and read it. It talked about firefighters. I'm like, they don't know who they're messing with here. So I got out, and I walked to the booth that was set up, and I said, "Okay. So, what is this about you want volunteers, and these guys handed me, a woman in my fifties, this flyer? Are you serious that you want a woman who is in her fifties, who can't carry a 350 pound dummy up five flights of stairs?" Because I'd actually applied for a firefighter position in 1996. That was one of my bright ideas. This would be interesting to see if San Jose really does want older women in their department. I had medical things that happened where I couldn't go to the interview. I actually was having surgery the day I was supposed to interview, so I had to call and cancel it. But I thought, what the heck. Let's just see. When I was a little kid I wanted to be a firefighter. It's something that women could never do. So I'm talking to this guy, Bob Pereira, who turned out to be the captain for Jamestown fire. I live in Jamestown. And he said, "Well, hell, if I had to carry a 350 pound dummy up five flights of stairs I couldn't do it either! Yeah, we're interested. If you can make it through the academy you've got a position. We don't pay. But you can do it." (laughter) So I'm kind of like . . . hmm, let me think here. I'll think about it.

I ended up going to the Tuolumne County Fire Academy, and getting trained by the California Department of Forestry captains. I made it through the academy! I passed the physical and the written tests, and became a firefighter at Jamestown. So at Jamestown (this is always a crack-up to me), after Captain Pereira left, there was the chief and there



was me. (laughter) That was the volunteer fire department. And then later we got Robert Anzar, who was also a lieutenant at a couple of other stations. I did that for about two years and loved it! I just stopped this last April, partly because I had a second grandchild and needed to come back to Santa Cruz a lot more. And it takes a lot of time to stay in shape, especially at my age, more at my age. I found myself going out of shape because I was traveling to see the grandchildren. The book was coming to a point where I was going to need to put even more energy into looking at the whole manuscript, rather than just pieces of it. So I backed off, and was eternally grateful this summer, because it was a very hot summer, and the first CDF woman firefighter died in a fire. Just up in the Tuolumne canyon. And I could have gone on that fire if I were still in . . .

So that was a big thing for me, both to make it through the academy and to be told by some of the nineteen to twenty-two year olds that I was an inspiration to them. One of just a couple of women going through. We were this little group. We were all really short, little women. (laughter) And these big guys. Yet we found ways to get through the academy. We were there and encouraged the guys to get through. We all had three times to pass the physical tests. I made it through on the second time. It completely blew my mind that I made it through. I went back the third testing day to cheer the guys on who hadn't made it through, and one woman who didn't make it through. It was so sad for me, because they had to go . . . You don't just get to re-test later. You have to go through the whole academy again. So it's a lot of work and a lot of time. The battalion chief told me he was proud of me. The training captains told me. And it wasn't about my age, or me being a woman. For them, they said it was about the perseverance, that I really wanted to know how to do this. They said I raised the bar. (laughter)

So having gone through being a woman in technology, a woman in archaeology . . . At the time I went into archaeology it was not a woman's field. Women had a really hard time making it through graduate school, and getting funding, and competing for the

digs was really difficult, no matter where you were in the world. So it was kind of like, wow, I broke both a personal barrier and a barrier for . . . I mean, there's a lot of women in fire there, so if I could have made it anywhere it would have been in the foothills, where there's a lot of fire, and a lot of people are needed constantly for fire issues, and for medical response, which was the bulk of what we did. So that was real special to me.

So that, and writing, and working in a domestic violence/sexual assault agency, and I'm now the data analyst evaluator at the Mountain Women's Center, which is all about grants—writing some reports, and collecting data, and making sure it's in a shape that can go out, and maintaining their databases. I'm also now their computer geek, computer nerd kind of person. Because there aren't that many people out there who have the skills that we got at the university, or that students get here, or need to do in order to make it through the university. I installed a computer network together with a guy that I worked with at Calaveras, who I found to be very good at doing this, and was willing to donate a lot towards the women's organizations, towards making this happen. We worked fourteen-hour days installing the network, and running cables, and then setting up software and stuff. I've learned a lot from him, and again it's like watching the community resources work.

It turns out that my director went to UCSC at some point during her life, and we both knew some of the same people, including both admiring Gloria Anzaldúa tremendously, and Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich. It just goes on and on. A woman in my writing group did her whole MFA thesis on Adrienne Rich's writing. So UC and the Women's Center affect people over really long distances. People know the Women's Center. We had two volunteers in the training that just finished about a week ago who, when I had to give presentations to them on a couple of issues, came up to me afterwards and said, "We know you from somewhere. Where did you work before this?" I said, "Well, I was in Santa Cruz before." "You were at the Women's Center, weren't you? That's where we

knew you from!" Then one of them talked about being a student, and then a staff member. So the women who come through this university, or the students, male and female, who go through here, and are women's studies students, or work at the Women's Center, or have some connection there, or go to the programs, they're out there in the world. And the things they do are pretty amazing. I've seen them. It's wonderful.

**Reti:** Thank you so much, Arlyn.



Left to Right: Gloria Anzaldúa, Paula Gunn Allen, Bettina Aptheker, Grace Paley, Adrienne Rich, Sharon Maeda. Photo by Annie Valva. All Rights Reserved Celebrating Women Panel, 1989.

## Shane Snowdon

*Shane Snowdon was director from September 1, 1995 to October 31, 1999. Snowdon enriched the center with her extensive experience as a feminist activist and organizer. She had edited the nationally known feminist newspaper Sojourner, directed the Bay Area chapter of Breast Cancer Action, a radical national women's health education and advocacy group, and worked in New York City with Congresswoman Bella Abzug on an international women's cancer prevention campaign. Snowdon had also worked with at-risk youth in San Francisco. Snowdon arrived at the Women's Center in an historical moment when a generation gap was opening between the second wave feminists of the 1970s and the students who were grappling with what, if anything, feminism meant to them. With tremendous energy and clarity, Snowdon devoted herself to bridging that gap and empowering young women to become organizers and leaders. Although the center continued to serve staff, faculty, and community women, this greater focus on the students did represent a shift in focus for the Women's Center.*

*In 1999 Snowdon left the Women's Center to become the Director of LGBTI Resources at UC San Francisco. More recently she also became "LGBTI point-person" for the University of California system as a Fellow in the UC Office of the President.*

*I interviewed Snowdon at my house on November 11, 2004.*

—Irene Reti

**Reti:** [It's] Veteran's Day, 2004, and I'm here with Shane Snowdon. We're going to be talking about her years as director of the Women's Center. Let's start with some basic background on you, like where you were born, where you grew up, so we have some context.

## Early Background

**Snowdon:** I grew up in Maryland, a southern border state, at a time when it was really changing because of the civil rights movement. I saw those changes up close, and I saw the civil rights movement up close, because my mother was really devoted to it. All that was very, very influential. And then, as I became a teenager, Washington, [D.C.], the capital, became the site of gigantic anti-war protests and marches which were really, really engaging for me. My mother was also a peace activist, and even though I was just twelve, she really pulled me into the anti-war movement. So I grew up in the ethos of the Kennedy years, with a sense of Camelot and possibility, with hundreds of thousands of people coming to Washington to make change, to stop the war.

I always say that I grew up in an atmosphere of possibility and idealism and activism, with people organizing to do two things we never would have dreamed possible: end segregation and end the war. Temperament is important, but I think growing up with an activist mother in the part of the country which was the focal point for organizing against racism and for peace—I think that had a huge effect on me. I don't think you could have lived anywhere else in the country and had exposure to those movements in quite the same way. I think this is very lucky. There was no question in my mind growing up that I wanted my life to be about social change.

I used to say this to students at Santa Cruz, because they'd say, "How come you're so optimistic [both laugh] and so activist?" I'd say (and this would sometimes make them feel kind of sad, and a little bit envious), "Well, I grew up in a time and in a place where you just very naturally thought, even when young, or maybe especially when young, 'Absolutely, my work is about changing the world and my energy should go toward that, and the world can be changed and [laughs] the world is waiting for us.'" There was no question in my mind growing up that that's what my work life was going to be about. That's what my life was going to revolve around.

The students I talked to about this at Santa Cruz used to say, “That’s kind of what we have heard about the sixties, but we wondered if maybe it was a cliché or [both laugh] something that people look back on pretty unrealistically.” And I would say, “Well, maybe it is a cliché or rose-tinted glasses for some folks, but for me...” Yeah, I had a classic sixties upbringing. It wasn’t about drugs and sexuality, because I was really young. It was about idealism and change.

**Reti:** So you were born when?

**Snowdon:** 1956. So I was seven when King gave the “I Have a Dream” speech. Just old enough to appreciate it. That’s sort of the point from which I date my activism. People don’t think of Maryland as the cradle [laughs] of social change work, but it was for me.

**Reti:** Then how did you get involved in feminism?

**Snowdon:** Well, when I was in high school the women’s movement had been formed. Betty Friedan had written *The Feminine Mystique*, and [Gloria] Steinem and [Bella] Abzug were well-known figures. The women’s movement was just exploding on the scene. And I wanted nothing to do with it. I was very, very resistant to feminism.

**Reti:** [laughs]

**Snowdon:** I thought it was all about privileged white middle-class women in New York City—and, actually, I just named three middle-class women from New York City, so I was not totally wrong about that! I thought of it as about white privileged middle-class women, and I felt that it was kind of a crutch, that women could make it on their own. I was at a girls’ school, and I’d gone there for a long time, and I had been steeped in: you can do it, you can do it! And I thought, Well, you can do it! We can do it! We don’t need a movement.

What I wasn't seeing was my own level of white middle-class privilege. I didn't have enough life experience, remotely, to know how much we needed a movement. So I was really quite resistant to feminism and critical of feminism as an adolescent.

### **Becoming a Feminist**

Then I left high school and entered the real world, and oh my God! There was really no way that I could deny the power and usefulness of feminism. I began to understand feminism as much more than it had been portrayed in the media. The media portrayed feminism as strictly a white middle-class movement about choice, and about the ability to work outside the home. Now, these are critical. But I didn't see diverse faces. I didn't see explicit attention to the needs of poor women and working-class women.

When I got out of high school, though, I experienced the real diversity of feminism. I saw it for myself. I got beyond the media stereotypes. I met women who were founding rape crisis centers. Who were founding battered women's shelters. Who were going out and doing literacy work and support work with women on welfare. Who were beginning the women's health movement, which was profound—actually daring to look at their bodies “down there”! When I realized how much more there was to feminism than the media portrayal, important as this was, of women marching down Fifth Avenue for choice, and Betty Friedan writing about “bored and restless suburban middle-class women,” I thought, This is incredibly powerful—I can't not be part of this.

The other thing out of high school that really allied me to feminism was that I came out as a lesbian. And resistant as the women's movement was in those years to lesbians—you know, Betty Friedan very famously proclaimed the “lavender menace” and would not allow out lesbians like Rita Mae Brown to come to the microphone at feminist meetings—there were many lesbians involved in the women's movement. The women's movement was a place that was more hospitable than any other place certainly [laughs]



to lesbians. It was beginning to talk about the power of women loving women, and so that also sent me to the women's movement and to feminism.

What was useful in terms of being at Santa Cruz later was having as a teenager been very resistant to feminism, having no use for it, feeling like: This is not diverse. This is single- or dual-issue. This has nothing to do with me. Can't we just make it on our own?

I had had all those thoughts and feelings, and so when I encountered them in Santa Cruz students, I went, "Yeah, I can understand where you're coming from. I was there. I kind of bought into the media portrayal of the women's movement. I didn't see diverse faces because the media isn't going to bring those up. The media's not going to do justice to complex economic issues. It's going to present things in a not-very-appealing way, and I'm with you. I don't have a huge problem with your perceptions of the women's movement. But, you know, let's talk. I'll tell you about some other things I've found and I've seen in feminism. And you tell me if there is anything there that you feel is important and powerful for yourself. Or if there's something there that reminds you of something relating to you as a woman that you do want to organize around."

Feminism in the early days was so identified with choice, and I as a lesbian felt like, hmm, if essentially feminism is a pro-choice movement, great as that is.... But, of course, there were many, many, many other issues in addition to choice that were being organized around that did have huge personal significance for me. And, of course, as a lesbian, how could choice not have significance? There were all the women around me, and there was the fundamental question of control over our own bodies. But it took me a while to see, oh, this is not just about those straight women "over there." This is the larger question of control over the body.

So there was an interesting parallel later, talking with Santa Cruz students. When I encountered Santa Cruz students, many of them felt—and there was frustration with

them about this on the part of some older women involved in the Women's Center—a lot of them felt: "Hey, choice is a done deal. We don't need to worry about that. That's taken care of. That's safe, thank you very much. Your feminism was a lot about choice, and that is now an issue that's been resolved." And some of the older women would say, "It isn't necessarily resolved. It could change in your lifetimes. It was very different when we were young." But the students would still say, "Look, we have a right to our own judgments. We are the coming political powers of the future. We honestly don't think that just because you lived through a different time, that time's going to come again." And there would be a kind of stalemate, with the young women saying, "Look, we're the people who are going to control whether it's an issue or not, and we're saying we think this issue has been dealt with."

So, to get out of this stalemate, I would propose, essentially from my own experience, "Well, what if you see 'choice' as not necessarily that procedure which you believe, rightly or wrongly, is always going to be available? What if you think about what women were saying underneath the pro-choice movement—that we have a right for our bodies to be safe, and strong, and within our own control? And now let's think about [pause] eating disorders, unheard of in the early days of feminism. Let's think about your relationship with food. Let's think about your relationship with alcohol. Let's think about your personal safety. Because one thing that hasn't changed from the early days of feminism to now is how much violence there is against women. I think young and old, we can all unite around, 'We don't feel safe walking the streets even of Santa Cruz at ten o'clock at night!'"

**Reti:** Yeah.

**Snowdon:** That hasn't changed at all. And that's about feeling strong in our bodies, and having control over our personal space. So I'd say, "You may or may not feel that choice is going to come up as an issue again, but there's something there that I suspect you can

really relate to, and get pretty concerned and activist and inspired about.” One of the great experiences at Santa Cruz was seeing that stalemate shift, and older women begin to realize that there are underlying principles that might look different in the lives of young women today, but that are really the same principles that animated us. And we can find common ground.

**Reti:** That’s great.

**Snowdon:** My work as a women’s center director, a chunk of it, was moving younger women and older women out of the stalemate and creating space where they could meet and be inspired by each other. So the older women weren’t just saying: “You all don’t get it. You despise the ‘f’ word. If you only knew how hard it was, and how much we’ve done, and how much the world has changed, and how hard you’re going to have to work to perpetuate all the change we’ve created!” [laughs]

**Reti:** That doesn’t go very far.

**Snowdon:** That was not a message that really appealed to students. However much truth there might be in a message like that, it was not a “dialogue-enhancing” message.

**Reti:** Okay. So right before you came here, what were you doing?

**Snowdon:** Right before Santa Cruz I had a really interesting life, in which half the time I was in the Bay Area heading Breast Cancer Action, a radical national women’s health education and advocacy group, and half the time I was in New York City working with Bella Abzug on what I used to jokingly call an “intergalactic” (given the breadth of Bella’s vision of change) international women’s cancer prevention campaign. [laughter] Bella had seen the U.S. breast cancer advocacy movement after she herself had breast cancer, and she asked herself, “What are the rates of cancer for women in other countries? And if it’s the case that rates of cancer for women in industrialized countries

are far higher than for women in countries that are less industrialized, what can we do here in the U.S. not only to call attention to our industrialization-linked rates of breast cancer, but to prevent this kind of epidemic growth in cancer rates in countries that aren't yet at those levels?" It was a typically Bella-ish vision of global change—women being in dialogue with one another, trying to make change before a time of crisis for women in less industrialized countries. So I split my time between Bella, who was an incredibly inspiring and also incredibly challenging person [laughs], and BCA out in California.

Before that, thinking about jobs—well, of course, all my work related to the Women's Center work. But as far as explicitly feminist or women-related jobs, before that I was the director of an Oakland domestic violence agency. Would that domestic violence were not a "women's issue," but of course, overwhelmingly, it is! Before that, strangely, having worked a lot in predominantly women-ish work environments, I was head of an employment and training program in San Francisco that worked almost entirely with men. It worked with ex-prisoners and youth at risk, and as we know, although the incarceration rate for women has grown, for young men of color, especially young African American men, it is sky-high. I was very, very involved in those issues—how to create alternatives for young men of color in the city and county of San Francisco. Trying to deliver employment and training. And before that, again to mention the most relevant jobs, I was the publisher and editor of *Sojourner*.

**Reti:** I thought I remembered that. That's where I knew your name from.

**Snowdon:** Yeah, the national women's newspaper. I did that between the ages of twenty-six and thirty.

**Reti:** Oh my God! I didn't know you were so young when you did that.

**Snowdon:** Yeah, so I was actually in the position of a young woman [laughs] coming into a resource that had been created by women who had been the founders of the second wave of feminism. I had inherited this resource from a group of older women who were very concerned about what this young whippersnapper would do, and who had a lot of advice for me . . .

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Snowdon:** . . . and to whom I had to say: “Your feminism [laughs], which is incredibly inspiring and powerful, is based on the notion that women of succeeding generations and women of different backgrounds will come to power in their own way, tell their own truths, and manifest their own forms of feminism.” So, very helpfully for the Santa Cruz Women’s Center, I had the experience of being the young whippersnapper editor of this cherished national newspaper. I had the experience of being with older women and hearing what they had done, and cherishing that, and also having to figure out for a whole younger generation of women like me, “What can this newspaper offer? What can it be? Because it’s really clear, if only from the subscription data, that if we just keep on doing what this newspaper has always done, it will be beloved by this older group and no one else!” And that was a wonderful experience in many other ways. I had a national overview of feminism and was working with a whole slew of authors, Adrienne Rich and Alice Walker, and Audre Lorde, Olga Broumas, Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa—Bella, for that matter! An incredibly inspiring group of authors on still some very, very groundbreaking work. But I also, more particularly to Santa Cruz, had that experience of bridging the generations and trying to figure out: what does the feminism of yesteryear have to say or offer now? So that was very profound.

And then another experience, in a very male-influenced environment, that I think was very helpful for me is that I worked in construction for a period of time. One aspect of feminism when I first encountered it—though I didn’t think then it would have anything

to do with me—was the notion of women going into very non-traditional jobs. That notion has largely faded out in our society, but we had the idea that women would really go into the trades. That hasn't come to pass. But when I was a young woman, that was a very powerful vision—that we would be carpenters and we would be plumbers and we would be electricians.

**Reti:** I remember those days, sure!

**Snowdon:** Yeah! And that would strengthen us individually. Our bodies would be stronger. We would literally learn new tools. Processes long unknown to women would become our own. So, working in construction, I had that experience of empowerment, physical and otherwise.

I also had the experience of being in a very male environment, and getting a good sense—as I did in my employment and training days, working very closely with prisoners and youth at risk—a very strong sense of: what challenges do men face in the culture? And in particular, what challenges do men face that would encourage them in their sexism, or even their violence toward women? Because in construction and in employment and training, I worked with a number of men who were, by their own statements, rapists and batterers—precisely the men whom we had talked about in founding rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters. So I had the opportunity of meeting the "enemy" and really getting a good feel for what's acting on men in the culture. And, again, I think that was helpful for Santa Cruz. A large percentage of the students are men, and it makes a lot of sense, if you're going to be a successful and powerful women's center, to be tuned into and interested in what's going on with young men, and not just looking at what resistances young women may have around feminism or self-empowerment. What are the resistances that young men have to the message of feminism, to what I'd consider the deeper empowerment of not feeling like you have to secure personal power by achieving power over other people?

So I had a background of working closely with men whom feminism in some ways has considered the enemy. Just getting to know them, and being in their same space—going through judgment and discomfort, but still staying in the space. I suppose that may be one reason women didn't remain in the trades. It's not easy to be in the heart of that environment—for example, in construction, to be around men who routinely, when women pass by, harass them. I mean, it was very helpful to have the experience of not being the woman harassed, but standing with twenty-five men doing the harassment and thinking, well, how can I stop that? What should I do? The women passing on the street have their responses, but what should I do as the woman standing here with the men doing it?

There's a lot of richness there for how does feminism succeed, and how does a women's movement succeed, and how do behaviors really change. You can only get so much insight as women together into what is going on with men who harass and abuse and taunt and are violent and rape and all the rest.

**Reti:** That's very rich.

**Snowdon:** The final experience I would say was very helpful in coming to Santa Cruz was that I had tremendous struggles in college. I was not someone who sailed through college easily. And you could make a case that anytime you hire someone for a responsible position in a college environment, it should be someone who found it really easy to go to college...

**Reti:** Oh, not necessarily, no.

**Snowdon:** . . . and was traditionally successful. [laughs] And I actually found, the longer I stayed in Santa Cruz, that the fact that I had really struggled with college was very helpful in supporting students. Unfortunately, there was practically no problem that a woman student could bring to me, that seemed to really threaten her success, that

I had not actually experienced. I guess the trick is, of course, not only to have experienced it, but to somehow, over the course of the years, at least to have figured out what you could have done, even if you didn't do it, to work with the challenge.

**Reti:** Right. So you don't stay stuck.

**Snowdon:** Yeah. So the fact that I . . . well, as the students would say, that I experienced a lot of fuck-ups in college was actually very helpful in relating to the women I later encountered. [laughter] I had a very down-to-earth idea of what happens to you as a woman in college that makes it really tough to stay centered and have the classic great college experience.

**Reti:** Okay. So then what inspired you to apply for the job of Women's Center director at UCSC?

**Snowdon:** I had had these very, very demanding and exhausting jobs. Certainly it's demanding and exhausting just to commute between San Francisco and New York. But also exhausting in terms of the challenges: how do you provide employment and training to some of the most despised people in the city and county of San Francisco? How do you work effectively in domestic violence in the city of Oakland, with an incredibly high domestic violence rate, and so much hopelessness and oppression? I'd been executive director of several other groups, in addition, that I haven't mentioned. All these groups were at turning points organizationally that required an enormous amount from me just in terms of fundraising and strategic planning and staff turnover. So the issues that I worked on were exhausting, the work style of bi-coastal commuting was exhausting, and being hired to take on organizations in transition, some of them at the edge of death, was really exhausting. And my mother had died also in that last year.

And I felt, hmm, wouldn't it be different and interesting and positive to take a job where I'm not actually on the front lines with a life-and-death issue like cancer, domestic



violence, imprisonment? Where the institution is established, where it's not a non-profit fighting for its life in a hostile society. And where I might, because it's an academic environment, have a chance to reflect on feminism today and all my experiences. Where there's an institution holding the resources and making them available, where I'm off the front lines and have an opportunity to reflect, and yet to do meaningful work with young people, whom I've never worked with as a group before. (I'd worked with young people, but always on some other basis.)

### **Coming to the UCSC Women's Center**

I'd gotten back from a trip to New York and I thought, I just have to get out of town and go be in nature. I drove down to Santa Cruz, and went onto the campus like a million people before me and thought, Oh, this is so beautiful and inspiring! I wonder if they have any jobs available? Wouldn't this be a great environment to be in?

And eerily, when I actually dropped by Human Resources and looked at the postings, Director of the Women's Center was posted with a closing date of the next day. And I thought [gasps], Well, clearly this is meant to be. [laughter] Because I had come down to Santa Cruz for a reason just that very day, to reflect on my life and be away and in nature in a beautiful spot, and here was this job. It was one of those moments when you look at the qualifications and you think, ah—it's as if it was written for *moi*! So I just had a sense that this was really the way I should go.

I wasn't sure whether I would . . . I did not identify as an academic. That would be difficult given my own college difficulties. [laughs] Did not identify as an academic. Had never thought of working for the University of California. Didn't have a thought of, Oh, now I'm going to work for the University of California for the rest of my life. But it seemed really right for that particular time in my life. And I also immodestly hoped that someone like me, not a traditional.... I knew nothing about the Women's Center at all. I

just had this notion that maybe someone like me—who had struggled with college, and had spent a lot of time doing non-traditional things, and been a grassroots feminist activist and writer—that maybe someone like this would be really helpful in the role of Women's Center Director. I mean, again, I had no idea who had ever been director, or what the Women's Center was like. I had no clue. I don't think I was even able to find it that day, like many people before me. [laughs]

**Reti:** [laughs] Right. That's one of the big issues.

**Snowdon:** It seemed like a kind of a wonderful match in my own little mind. [laughs]

**Reti:** I can completely see that. Okay, so you applied for the job in one day?

**Snowdon:** I did!

**Reti:** You got it together and ...

**Snowdon:** Actually, I drove back down the next day to drop off my application. I was very, very enthused. It just seemed very right.

**Reti:** Okay, so now let me take you to, you're just starting to be director at the Women's Center. What were your first impressions of the place? In terms of where it was at when you started.

**Snowdon:** I thought: I'm going to go be at an organization that's really different from any I've ever been at. I'm not going to be at a struggling non-profit that isn't sure whether it should close down, or if it stays open what it will do, whether it needs to change its mission or its services. But when I got to the Women's Center, well, it turned out it was in a time of transition. Its long-time director had been on a leave. It was clearly a place that was at a turning-point. Not unlike all these other places. And I think I had

sort of had the notion that I would get there and it would be, as is the case at many, many campuses, a room, or a couple of rooms, right at the center of campus. [laughs]

**Reti:** Right.

**Snowdon:** But, right there, Women's Center aside, was there a center of campus? There was no center of campus. So my notion of a couple of rooms at the center of campus with a lot of students flowing in and out at all hours, and an organization that probably had a tremendous number of student volunteers, and a lot of women running around putting up posters and meeting in support groups—I discovered, Oh, for a million reasons, that's not what's happening, and in fact this is really an organization like many that I've worked at before, that sees itself as at a turning-point and is in transition, as this person who for a long time has been heading it leaves the scene and goes on to new things. It was a time when everyone was stopping and thinking, Well, now what?

That's a very interesting thing about the Women's Center at Santa Cruz, different from other women's centers, almost all other women's centers. It's at a place on campus where you're not naturally ever going to see any students. So the only way you're going to involve students in the Women's Center is by intention and energy. There is no natural, "Oh, I was going to the bookstore, or to have a cup of coffee, and that was an interesting poster," or, "I heard some music that drew me in." Every single student who gets there you have encouraged to get there by some program or service that you've had to think a lot about, because it is quite a shuttle ride down.

### **Cardiff House as a Location for the Women's Center**

**Reti:** That's one of the questions I had, the location issue. Do you think that that was a mistake? Did you ever think about moving the Women's Center?

**Snowdon:** Oh, yeah. I mean, this is a perennial question for the Women's Center. When I got there one thing that was presented to me as a gigantic challenge, I mean there was no ambivalence about this, was the location. "This is a huge, huge, huge challenge. It will be very difficult to get students down here." Well, I'd come to a number of non-profits where people had said, "This is a huge challenge and we just don't know if it can be overcome." And so here people were saying once again, "This is a huge challenge and we don't know if it can be overcome." And there was a division of opinion about whether the space should be maintained down at Cardiff House, or whether the Women's Center should move up to campus.

**Reti:** The division being on the board, or just in the community generally?

**Snowdon:** Well, at that time the stakeholders, I would say, were mostly policy board members. There were a few student staff and one other professional staff member. Yeah, as I recall, opinion was pretty evenly divided.

**Reti:** Wow. I didn't realize that.

**Snowdon:** Yeah. And why not? I mean, it is a very remote location. And, of course, there's also the fact that the campus raised the question: "Do you want to come up? What about this space? What about that space? Wouldn't it be better?" That was a perennial question. So it wasn't just a question in the minds of Women's Center folks. It was also a question in the minds of the central Student Services administration. Logically so—they have one student service that's way far away from all the others. And where I landed on it was—we ended up making a virtue of the location, creating the slogan "The Women's Center: on the edge of campus, for a reason."

**Reti:** Oh, I remember that now.

**Snowdon:** We had it on buttons. We had it on t-shirts. And it became a famous slogan. I mean, someone told me they just saw it in Seattle the other day. What we did was we just marketed the heck out of the location. We said to students, "Yeah, it's an exotic shuttle ride away." We didn't conceal the fact [laughs] that it was remote and a shuttle ride away, and you really couldn't walk there. We said, "Yeah, hop on the exotic shuttle. Take a tour of campus. Come on down. It's the oldest residence in Santa Cruz County. It's like nothing else on campus. You're way far away. We have free Internet. We have an incredibly cozy location. We're pretty wonderful people. Yeah, take a trip to the exotic West!" And it was amazing. We could not print enough pins and t-shirts that said "On the Edge of Campus for a Reason." And, as I say, they've really lasted. It became this virtue: "I care enough about fill-in-the-blank to schlep down to the Women's Center for it."

It became pretty cool and happening and interesting to go down to the Women's Center, especially after we opened at night. It was not that cool and happening and interesting to try to get to the Women's Center during the day between classes—that was a drag. But at night classes are over, and the Women's Center has a kitchen, cocoa, marshmallows, sofas, Internet, music, cool staff—that's a whole other matter! But we had to think outside the box. We had to think: Can this be turned into a slogan with meaning? Can we expand our hours, literally expand our hours, so that what is a deficit becomes fun? A lot of people are going to their apartments off-campus anyway—why not hop off the shuttle and have a warm, interesting time over at the Women's Center before going home for the night?

**Reti:** It's right on the way.

**Snowdon:** Yeah, once you're down there it's just a walk on your way off campus. And the other thing we did was, when we had done enough programs to know what the really hot ones were, we did export them up to the central campus and do them in

college common rooms. And sometimes they became institutionalized by the res[idence] staff, or by health services staff. So I wasn't defiant around our location. [laughs] I made it into a virtue a certain amount of the time, and the rest of the time said, "Look, let's figure out some ways to make this part of the programming up at Kresge or up at Stevenson." And that was actually quite successful, too.

But some of our edgier and more popular programs—like, on relationships and sexuality—at first couldn't really happen up at the colleges. Now they're very common on campuses, but ten years ago they were edgy, even for Santa Cruz. For that matter, programs on food and eating disorders hadn't really happened at Santa Cruz. Hadn't happened on any campuses, really. And women were very concerned about these edgy, interesting programs: "Do I want to be seen going into a sexuality program?" Like, not a program about coming out, or being a lesbian—just a program on sex, and how to enjoy it more and have it be a really positive part of your life. "Do I want to be seen going into an eating disorders thing? Do I want to be seen going into a how-to-have-a-better-relationship thing? Do I want to be seen going into a women's depression thing?" These programs we initially had down at the Women's Center.

But then as they became more popular, and stigma became reduced, people said, "Wow, this should happen up at my college." And also, we didn't have the capacity to keep doing everything at the Women's Center. So we realized, and the college staff realized, this stuff could and should happen up at the colleges. And not only could it be destigmatized. Over time it could be, like, "Hey, let's everybody go over to the sexuality workshop tonight!" And, "Yeah, there's that thing on eating disorders, but it's not clinical. It's not pathologizing. It's an opportunity as women to sit around talking about food together. So that's okay. I can do that. I don't need to necessarily go down to the Women's Center to do that anymore."

**Reti:** That's really inspiring.

**Snowdon:** Yeah, it was. So I felt like, let's make the most of the location. Let's not be too discouraged by it, because we've got great stuff. We get to be down here in this beautiful building, which lends itself—this is the other part of the slogan “On the Edge of Campus for a Reason”—to creativity and thinking outside the box. It's not fluorescent-lit, all on a long corridor, on a central campus. It's a location that says: think outside the box. It's a location where you can be open at night—very, very critical. There were not nighttime services in Hahn [Building] at that time. I don't know about now. You didn't do nighttime services then.

**Reti:** No, no.

**Snowdon:** And it was very clear a lot of what we needed to do for women we needed to have happen at night.

**Reti:** So are you the one started the nighttime hours?

**Snowdon:** Oh yeah, nighttime and weekends. That's when we did what we did primarily. The organized programs were nights and weekends. I mean, we did have students down during the day. But what we were identified with, the really cutting-edge programs that pulled in hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of new women, those were nights and weekends. And it was just fabulous to have this house with a kitchen and a lot of space where you didn't have to worry about security, or be out by a certain time, or have an alarm. Yeah, it was great.

**Reti:** What about the community women? Did you feel that you reached them? I know that's been a huge issue.

**Snowdon:** Well, it's very interesting. This was something that I grappled with tremendously my first year at the Women's Center. I got there, and, as I mentioned, it was at a turning-point. One question was, obviously, location. Do you stay here? Do you

go up there? What do you do about the location? Another question was, well, who do we serve, and what do we do? Because with a long-time director leaving, there's always, in any organization, some space. Things kind of slow down, and there's change. And it's an opportunity to sit there and ask, well, who do we want to serve, and what are we going to do?

This is obviously a huge process in an organization. Because who you have served may or may not be who you go on serving, and the programs you have done may or may not be the programs that four, five, six, ten years later you still want to be doing. This is just a gigantic process.

### **Who Are We Serving? Empowering Young Women**

I had done strategic planning both as a consultant and an executive director for a lot of organizations. So I thought: Well, okay. First of all, we'll do the usual scan for who we have served—who has felt really good about us, and who's felt relatively less served and less happy. Let's gather all that information.

I gathered some information using focus groups. And we did surveys of women students to find out what they wanted—we handed out questionnaires outside all the classes, not just women's studies, but all the classes. And at the café, and outside the bookstore. We wanted to find out what was on students' minds.

So we were handing out surveys and getting responses, which kind of surprised some of the older stakeholders at the Women's Center. "Oh, women students are answering surveys that say 'Women's Center' on them and they have lots of ideas? Oh!" The students did have a lot of ideas. They were not necessarily ideas [laughs] that were thought of as traditional Women's Center programs.

**Reti:** Such as?



**Snowdon:** Well, on the surveys we said: “What are the issues that you’re really struggling with in your lives?” We gave them a big issue list, and they were checking off things like “my relationship with food,” “my relationship with my boyfriend” (we gave them a “girlfriend” option, too, but most of them were checking “my relationship with my boyfriend”), “how much I’m drinking,” “how I’m going to get a job.” Well, these were not necessarily the needs or the programs that were thought of, in general, as college women’s center needs or programs, or that our particular Women’s Center had zeroed in on. But these were what women were checking off as the issues and struggles in their lives. And then when we asked them, “Do you feel like you’re getting your needs met?” they said, “Not really.” So it was not a situation of them checking off a lot of needs in their lives and then also saying those needs were being totally met with campus services. There was clearly a lot of need and a gap in terms of that need being met.

And I thought, Well, there are a lot of people we could serve. There are a lot of people we have served over the years. There are a lot of people we want to serve. But the bills are being mostly paid by students, through a conscious registration fee process, and they seem to have a lot of needs. Why don’t we start out by really focusing on the students and their needs, and then if, as many people are predicting, they’re not interested, or they won’t come down to the location, then we’ll have excess capacity, and we can think about what we’re going to do with that excess capacity in terms of community women, or staff women, or faculty, or women’s studies in general, or South County, or any number of other needs.

I really felt at the outset: for the sake of simplicity and integrity, let’s see what we can do for students. And if they don’t come and they’re not interested, and they’re getting their needs met elsewhere, I am fine with reorienting to another group.

But I felt we really needed to devote ourselves to the students first. Because as powerful and successful [as] the women’s movement had been, I knew—and the surveys were

validating this—that it is incredibly difficult and painful to be a young woman. Maybe a little differently so from when I was a young woman, because I was now twenty years older than the average frosh. I thought it might be differently hard in some ways to be a young woman, but I suspected one insight from feminism remained true: it's very, very difficult to be a young woman in our society. And to be a young woman just out of high school, negotiating relationships, negotiating a huge degree of freedom, looking at in several years going into the work world, having really serious, intense relationships in a residential setting—there just had to be a lot coming up. And I didn't think our culture had changed so much, thanks to the women's movement, that these women were, like, "all set," and we could afford to really attend to another group.

And I also felt . . . I'll go out on a limb here and say I felt ... [long pause] I felt it was...well, how shall I put this—I was uncomfortable with taking the students' money and using it for other things. I thought, is there a little bit of ageism and "we know best" in that? Don't we need to check in with them about their money? Have they said, "We are giving this money so that you can provide services to other women?" Maybe they have said that, or will say that, but I thought there should be an open process.

**Reti:** A certain kind of accountability.

**Snowdon:** Right. I felt service to other people is clearly a good thing, but have the students really been asked? Do they know that's where their money is going? If they don't, where's the accountability and the honoring of young women in that? How is that empowering young women? A women's center that is fundamentally about empowering young women needs to give them the opportunity to say: "Here are our needs, and here's our money—help us put these resources and these needs together."

And I also thought: shouldn't they be deciding what they want to do with their time and their labor? Shouldn't they, at a women's center, be defining their own jobs and be given the opportunity to create programs and services for themselves?

So I really wanted to go down that road, and not take their money and their labor and devote it to non-student enterprises. Now, that isn't to say that's what would have happened. But I just felt, let's not do that for the time being. Let's plow it back into them, and let them define what that looks like.

And of course that wasn't easy, because there weren't two hundred young women knocking on the doors of the Women's Center and saying, "This is our center and our money, and we have needs." It was more diffuse than that. There were surveys with a lot of needs. There was an amount of money coming from student fees. But we had to figure out how to take the money, and the needs written out on surveys filled out between cups of coffee, and go from there to really meaningful programs and services. It was a great idea, but living it out was really huge and challenging. I think that's kind of the art of running a Women's Center. You know you have women students, and you know they have really big needs, and you have a little bit of money. How do you put all that together for them? Without yourself being ageist and kind of imperialist and saying, "Well, I'm a person twenty years older ..."

**Reti:** "Trust me!" [both laugh]

**Snowdon:** Right: oops! It was really, really interesting for me, because I did feel like, well, there are lots of wonderful uses for their money, and their needs are kind of diffuse, and they're not knocking on the door, and, and.... But then I'd remind myself, Shane, if they don't know exactly yet what they want or what they need, maybe that's because you need to sit down and take them ultra-seriously and say, "It's your space. It's your

money, your time, your lives. Tell me. We're creating a container here. What do you want to have fill it?" And that was a lot [of] my first year.

**Reti:** And how did you get the students to come in and start getting involved, and what did they do?

**Snowdon:** Well, a lot of it was marketing—"aren't we cool and interesting on the edge of campus, and also we stay open at night." Which I felt fine about politically—I mean, marketing isn't necessarily anti-feminist.

So the students physically took over the space. They started coming down and hanging out there more, even though initially we didn't have a whole menu of programs and services. In fact, as far as the student staff were concerned, I made their jobs not doing programs and services at first. Because I felt they had to define them, that we needed to talk about what we were finding from these surveys, and what they were hearing from students at the colleges, and off-campus, and in classes. So I said, "We're just going to talk and talk about what the needs are and how we can meet them, and the whole first couple of quarters you work here is going to be program design."

**Reti:** Wow. What a great job!

### **Revisioning Student Programming**

**Snowdon:** Yeah. We would have these ultra-long staff meetings where we would sit around and talk about it all. And it sounds like that would be great, and it was, but it was also hard, because we'd say: "Yeah, right, the surveys are all saying they need this, but how will we do this? How will we meet this need without very much money?" Like, a lot of women are struggling with food in their lives, so we could bring in an eating disorders expert and do a workshop that's been done a million times. And in a way that's tempting, because then that box will be checked: 'Food issues—taken care of.' Or

we could take some more time and figure out what would be really empowering and appealing to students struggling with food in their lives.

That's when we started doing things like—we brought in this really interesting woman from Davis who had mounted a guerilla campaign of, every time she saw a billboard with a starving Calvin Klein model on it, taking a huge can of spray paint in the middle of the night and writing on it, "Hey, Calvin, give this woman a sandwich." Whenever she saw a billboard or a bus shelter poster, she did this guerilla action—"Don't tell me that I need to be thin to be happy and successful." It turned out that our particular Santa Cruz audience which wasn't that interested in going and having a psychologist present on eating disorders would turn out en masse to hear this Davis woman talk about getting up there and writing on a billboard "How dare you let this woman starve herself? Don't tell me I'm supposed to be eighty-nine pounds." Then, after she spoke, then more people would go to the "women and food" programs. Like, we had Geneen Roth come and speak on the emotional issues underlying eating from a feminist perspective—she was great. And we would never use the phrase "eating disorders" when we publicized these programs. That was another thing we would talk about, "What do you title things?"

**Reti:** Yeah. That phrase is...

**Snowdon:** You can't call them "eating disorders programs." You have to title them differently. You have to hold them at night. You have to introduce them with a really empowering, fascinating program about guerilla feminist action. [Both laugh]

**Reti:** That's pretty cool.

**Snowdon:** Everything was harder, but also richer, than we'd thought at first. So this was not just a couple of staff meetings. And fortunately there was a fabulous group of students my first year. I was so blessed. They were really, really into this process, and

they were diverse in terms of their age and their backgrounds. And they really cared about other women students. It was very touching. They were given individual responsibility for the programs they cared the most about. They designed them. They weren't labor in someone else's program. They would go on the web and find someone cool in their area. They would be responsible for contacting the person and thinking, How do I want to market this? They had buy-in. Then they would really get out there and put posters up and make class announcements because "Wow, this is my program! I think this woman from Davis is really cool, and I want other women to hear her! And learn what she's doing. And I want this to be a gateway to food issues groups."

Most of them were in their final quarter at Santa Cruz, although a couple of them stayed on—it was interesting—for a while to work on their programs. They were that into them. For the next year or so, we were able to draw on what they had conceptualized, and I was able to present to the next generation of work-study students the next year, "Okay, here's what we came up with last year. Whaddaya think?" And they'd go, "Okay, actually we're down with a good seventy-five, eighty percent of this. Let's do it."

We continued with all the idea-catalyzing staff meetings, but the meetings also became about, "How did the program go? And what help do you need in that program?" The staff meetings became pragmatic, but never totally pragmatic. There was always a huge planning vein running through them, always trying to think about, are we doing enough, and are we doing the right stuff? Because forgetting about programs that aren't drawing students and saying "no problem" frees up time, energy, and money to do something better.

Some of the things that came out were so cool. The food workshops were just incredible—I mean, they really brought food issues to attention on the campus. And we had relationship workshops that were packed, because they were real-world. How do you maintain yourself in your relationship? How do you stay centered and with

yourself? Most of the women were in relationships with men. Some of the women were in relationships with women. And I think one of the radical things about these workshops is that women came together and realized, “Oh, you know, lesbian and straight alike, we’re having some of the same difficulty with losing ourselves in our relationships.” We also had this fabulous series of “powerful presentation” workshops where you could learn stand-up comedy. You could learn speech-making. You could just work on your voice—

**Reti:** Oh! I took a speech class during that period.

**Snowdon:** So it didn’t end *up*, in a question. [raises voice querulously] Students were so down with that, how to speak powerfully. We did all kinds of interesting other stuff. We had a stand-up comedian come and do improv with the students—that was totally sold out. We had self-defense that was non-typical self-defense. We’d do the self-defense forms where you’re actually attacking a male, because we had a lot of space at the Women’s Center to do that. We did what I called the “Women of Courage” series. We picked out the most inspiring women we could think of around the country and around the world, and we brought them to talk. And so we had Winona LaDuke, the Native American activist. We had this twenty-two-year-old woman, Hafsat Abiola, whose parents had both been killed after winning democratic elections in Nigeria, who inherited their mantle. Fabulous women in the Women of Courage series. And I mentioned guerilla action before—we actually had the group The Guerilla Girls come to campus, this great group of women, based in New York, who wore gorilla masks and did performance pieces to dramatize women’s relative invisibility in the art world. And we had “What really are you going to do after graduation?” workshops—real-world, looking-at-women’s-work-issues workshops. Mostly popular in senior year, but packed to the rafters then. We had car repair workshops, car buying and car repair. We would have all-day Saturday workshops on car repair, or buying a car if you just have a

hundred dollars. Absolutely critical for students. Again, not a classic feminist issue, but if you don't have a car, and you're from South County, and you need to get down to see your parents and your siblings, you need a car. You need a car that runs. Cars as a feminist issue. Really interesting stuff.

Our motto was, we want to give a toolkit to students, and in that toolkit there has to be emotional support, there has to be physical support, there has to be work support, there has to be relationship support. And there has to be inspiration and vision and new-ideas-coming-in support. And yet, within that, things from the old days of feminism that people thought would not necessarily ever happen again did, in fact, happen.

Like, you have all these students sitting around thinking in new ways, doing new programs. Yet they found their way in this whole process to reviving Take Back the Night, which hadn't happened for years. They just grabbed hold of it and made it their own. It looked a lot like Take Back the Night as it used to happen, years before, and they loved that reaching back to the past. People always asked me about the students, "Aren't they kind of inimical to the feminism of the past?" No! They wanted to connect with it. They wanted to be inspired by it. They wanted to feel part of it, but it had to be right for them. Their Take Back the Night marches were fabulous. *The Vagina Monologues*—huge, huge and radicalizing. Just as for our generation it was radicalizing to sit in a living room with a speculum, whether or not you used it, and think about "down there," the equivalent for these women was *The Vagina Monologues*. At first, being an older feminist, I thought, this is going to be inspiring and wonderful and empowering?! But they were into it, so hey! You know, I had to walk my talk.

**Reti:** Was it a student production?

**Snowdon:** Oh, absolutely. So on the one hand they took Take Back the Night and revived it, and it had incredible meaning for them. And then, rather than meet in the Women's



Center living room and get out speculums [both laugh], they did *The Vagina Monologues*. That's how they dealt with, twenty-five years later, the taboo toward thinking about what's down there. I could give you example after example of how these young women identified their issues, figured out some new ways of addressing them, and also reached back.

**Reti:** That's so fabulous.

**Snowdon:** We had a lot of catchy phrases because it rapidly became clear to us that you could have a fabulous program, and if you gave it a dull and boring title, no one would ever come. So some of my work was bringing marketing [laughs] to the Women's Center. "Support group," we learned right away, was a very unhelpful term. You could say, "What's up with you and food?" and get twenty more people than for an "eating disorders workshop."

## Community Service

I felt very strongly about community service. There were some moments when I just said, "Look, I know community service is not necessarily at the top of your list of what you want to do or think needs to be done. But I'm going to suggest to you that this might be something you would find a lot of richness in. So let me tell you what I mean by that. Let me give you examples of community service, because I know that's a term that ..."

**Reti:** It sounds awful. It sounds like church charity or something.

**Snowdon:** Right. "So let's talk about what this could really mean. What this would mean is it's a Saturday morning, you get up, and you meet with twenty-five other women at the Women's Center, and you've reserved a bunch of vans, and you're in your jeans. And you've gone out and bought paint, and you all go down to a Watsonville agency and you paint it. You spend the weekend there, you meet with the director and find out what the

agency is all about, and when you leave that place on Sunday night, it looks totally different. And you know that if you hadn't been there, it would still look the way the director told you was terrible. You're going to go in there, and you are going to transform a place that really needs your help, and couldn't do it without you." We did this in several places close to campus and also in South County. We had a really powerful phrase for this that didn't involve the words "community service." It was incredibly successful.

So again, some of the stuff was familiar, like Take Back the Night, or community service. And self-defense: the concept wasn't new, but the particular form of it, namely, going after a male attacker and screaming at the top of your lungs, was a new form of self-defense for them to experience. And that particular approach is as much about being a woman who yells out as it is learning a particular form of self-defense that you do for the rest of your life. We looked at everything under the sun that seemed remotely useful to the student needs we had identified in the focus groups and on the surveys.

## Faculty

**Reti:** What about faculty? Did they stay involved with the center?

**Snowdon:** I wasn't that familiar with what had happened before. I hadn't even lived in Santa Cruz. I wasn't familiar with tradition and it wasn't clear to me who had been involved. So I can't really speak to how faculty used to be involved. What was articulated to me [from the faculty] in terms of the Women's Center [was that it was] a place to hold the occasional gathering. By the time I arrived, though, a lot of those gatherings were happening in spaces on campus, because the women's studies programs and other programs were more highly developed, and the Women's Center wasn't necessarily the only space where they could meet or the best space where they could meet. They had other venues. Whereas the students tended not to have a space

with a kitchen where they could safely gather and talk about what for them were pretty edgy topics.

### **Relationship with Women's Studies**

**Reti:** What was your relationship with women's studies? I know that originally there was a three-part vision, and women's studies and the Women's Center were very closely linked at one point.

**Snowdon:** I couldn't really generalize about it. It wasn't a monolithic relationship of one kind or another. I do know how much Helene Moglen and Marge Frantz, just to name two, did over the years for the Women's Center, founding it and protecting it and keeping it going. We ongoingly benefited from everything they did—and they stayed involved when I was there, which was very inspiring to the students and to me personally. And I always used to say that it would be very tough to keep the Women's Center really vital without Bettina Aptheker's introductory women's studies class. Bettina's class, which is full, year in, year out...

**Reti:** *Introduction to Feminism*, right.

**Snowdon:** Yeah. It helped so many young women feel their power and speak the truth of their lives, and led them to want to be part of the Women's Center, want to try a program, want to join the staff, want to volunteer, want to take a chance. So just that one class alone constituted a huge relationship with women's studies, and a really rich, important one. There's something we used to say in staff meetings, something like, "Thank God for Bettina. . . Without you, we'd be nothing!" [laughter] That was an overstatement, but there's no question that Bettina's class, the women and often the men in that class, were kind of a core, especially in my early years at the Women's Center. They were the people who would go to a Women's Center program that was new and edgy and go back and tell their classmates, "Hey, you know, you should really try this!"

This is really interesting, what's going on down there." They were pioneers and ground-breakers, and we needed those in the first year or two, because no one was accustomed to going down and doing a relationship or a food or a self-defense or even a car repair workshop at the Women's Center.

We eventually started doing workshops on women's wisdom through the ages, looking at traditional tools for getting to know yourself and for strengthening yourself. Who had gone down to the Women's Center and done programs like that before? We needed people who had been part of Bettina's class to take chances and try new things and new ways of knowing about yourself and the world. So that was a huge part of our relationship with women's studies. And certainly women's studies majors were wonderful ambassadors for the Women's Center and to the Women's Center.

I wasn't there in the early days. I don't know what people originally hoped for at Santa Cruz in terms of the Women's Center and women's studies. I do know certainly from my own background as a feminist, and as someone who organized women's studies at the colleges she attended, we viewed women's studies as not so much an academic enterprise as a process of individual women becoming empowered and going out into the world in whatever ways were individually right for them, maintaining their own sense of strength and integrity, and helping other women to find their strength and their path. And that's what I felt was the lodestar for the Women's Center, and to the extent that women's studies was about that—I think Bettina's class is very, very much about that—we had an enormous amount in common.

## **Diversity Issues**

**Reti:** Great. Now what about issues of diversity, particularly in terms of serving women of color?

**Snowdon:** Yeah, when I got to the Women's Center, Santa Cruz was . . . its student body was shifting significantly.

**Reti:** That's right. It was a really transitional time in that respect also.

**Snowdon:** Santa Cruz was accepting many more students, and many more students of color, in particular many more Chicana/o-Latina/o students. And the Women's Center had been a tremendous resource for Chicana and Latina students. So a real challenge I faced was: given that feminism in the world at large was generally identified as a white phenomenon, and I was a white woman, how would the Women's Center, now headed by a white woman, be perceived as a resource for students of color? And how would a resource that sounded associated with traditional feminism in general seem not to be just "a white thing"?

I felt that step number one, obviously, was hiring a diverse student staff, so that when we had our planning sessions, we had as many viewpoints as possible represented. I was incredibly lucky, again, that first year. They were very diverse. There were limits to how many work-study students our small budget could pay for, but even though we had limited amounts of money, we were able to get a diverse staff. So they were this very diverse group, the women responsible for conceiving the programs. And they sometimes created programs that specifically and explicitly addressed the needs of women of color. They were, for example, very involved in helping to create the Chicana/Latina Pipeline Project, which was just fabulous for most of the years I was at Santa Cruz. I'm not sure it exists now.

**Reti:** I'm not familiar with it. Can you say what it is?

**Snowdon:** It was a project whereby Chicana and Latina students at Santa Cruz, in a variety of ways, reached back into the high schools to Chicana and Latina students, and also to first- and second-year Chicana and Latina students at Santa Cruz. Met with them

intensively in peer settings, brought in established faculty, like Aida Hurtado, to mentor them, brought in staff, like Rosie Cabrera, to meet with them. Created a web of support, connected them with role models, gave them a lot of staff mentoring knowledge and opportunities. It was conceived by Chicana and Latina students, and was a joint project of the Chicano/Latino Resource Center, with Larry Trujillo, and the Women's Center. Very wonderful program, emulated around the country. So some programs and services were explicitly and specifically by and for women of color.

What the student staff ended up feeling a significant amount of the time, though, was that there were a lot of topics and programs that would be equally interesting to women students regardless of their backgrounds. But they also wanted to make sure, especially because women's centers are associated with white feminism, that we didn't seem to be saying, "This is a program essentially by, for, about white women."

Almost all of our programs did attract very diverse audiences. One exception would be—and this matches the statistics in the population at large—that the programs on food tended to draw more white students. And, statistically, eating disorders seem to be more common among white women than women of color. That appears to be not an issue of less research being done on women of color, but actually an elevated rate of eating disorders among white women. And, of course, there actually are different body image expectations in different communities. So once in a while we would come across a program that seemed skewed, and we'd have to think about whether it was skewed because of a larger statistical phenomenon.

### **Relationships with Other Women's Centers**

**Reti:** Did you have relationships with other women's centers? I know there's some kind of a UC-wide meeting now. Did that exist?

**Snowdon:** There is. Yeah, that did exist. I actually thought a tremendous highlight was getting together with other women's centers. There are two ways that happened. The women's centers in the country got together in connection with the National Women's Studies Association, and then the UC women's centers got together. What is happening for women's centers in some parts of the country where they've existed for a while is they're falling into non-existence.

**Reti:** Why?

**Snowdon:** [sighs] Oh, many different reasons. I think unless you go through a process of really energetically surveying the needs of young women today, unless you engage in that process and then shift your programming and services accordingly, you're going to get fewer and fewer and fewer people at your programs, whether it's an issue of how you market them, or an issue of what you're offering, or both. Some women's centers have been doing the same thing for a really long time. The women's centers that are thriving tend to be the newer ones, because by definition, having been created more recently, they are more tuned into recent needs. Whereas some of the long-established women's centers are struggling with mission, with drift, with how to attract women to their services. They feel demoralized. I think they feel puzzled.

One thing I did in my final year at the Women's Center—which, of course, I didn't realize at the time was my final year—was give presentations for other directors. I would bring our calendars, and sometimes student staff would come along, and we would say, "There is hope. Here's what a survey could look like, and here's how you could get it out. Here are programs. And you're probably better located than we are!" They would look at these programs and they would go "Oh! Oh, right! Yes, we could do those." Or, "Oh, we offer those, but our titles don't really do justice to the content." It's very, very easy—I mean, it's human nature—to keep doing the same thing. And if every second Wednesday for years you've had a faculty brownbag, and every third Thursday you've

had a rote meeting to review statistics or a meeting that no one really remembers the reason for, you don't necessarily have a lively women's center. I think that, unfortunately, a lot of people, as their women's centers have become less lively, have thought: "Well, this is because young women today aren't interested in the women's movement." They think the work is over. The Right has discredited the women's movement and made it seem unrespectable, and even repulsive, to be a feminist. So they feel like history is against them. They keep doing what they can, but they feel overwhelmed by the seeming success of the Right Wing. And I actually felt quite the reverse. In a lecture I used to give in women's studies, in Marge Frantz's class and others, I would paint a picture to the students, of the world before and after the women's movement, and I would say, "Don't let them tell you that the women's movement has been stopped. Don't let feminists tell you that the women's movement has been stopped."

### **How Different the World Is Because of the Women's Movement**

**Reti:** Oh, it's so different.

**Snowdon:** I would say, "You have no idea how different the world is." And I would say, "It's like those books you can buy about major cities, where on the left side of the page they have an old brown photograph of what the city and the neighborhood looked like in 1850, with horses and buggies. Then on the facing page they have a photo from the year 2000 of gleaming skyscrapers and cars."

**Reti:** [laughs]

**Snowdon:** And I would say, "It's that dramatic, the difference between the world before the second wave of feminism and the world after. And that same kind of potential exists for you, if you choose to step into it, and here are some ways you can." And they would feel like, "Whoa! The world really did change! And there is more to be done because,



come to think of it, I am just as scared of getting attacked on the street as you were. And I feel just as potentially overwhelmed in my relationships, probably, as you all ever did."

I mean, there's still way enough work for folks to do, work that hasn't been done. The movement is powerful. It was powerful. It can be powerful going into the future. I feel enormously hopeful. And I gave this talk with the idea of helping other people to feel hopeful. Then I took it out to women's centers and said, "Hey, there's so much you can help catalyze on your campus." And it is a question of catalyzing. You do have to allow women students to shape the stuff on their own. Sure, they're in their twenties. But we were in our twenties when we invented rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters! [laughter] We didn't know that much about life, either! So how is it that when we were twenty-two, we were fine with inventing what are now the routine services of today, and we somehow feel like these twenty-one- and twenty-two year-old women can't do the same?

**Reti:** Absolutely.

### **The Next Generation of Feminists**

**Snowdon:** So you need to radically examine your beliefs, help young women feel their own power, and get out of the way. And sometimes that's not going to look pretty. Like there was a question of whether on the table in the Women's Center there would be traditional women's magazines. The traditional answer to this is, "Well, certainly we're not going to have *Vogue* and *Elle* and *Cosmo* in a women's center!" And that was my initial reaction. I was like, "What are you doing?" [laughs] Somehow I forgot everything I had been saying: "This is your space. Make it your own. This is your container and your money, and you make it what you need for it to be." And then they were bringing in *Cosmo*, and *Elle*, and *Vogue*, and I thought, "Whoa! Is this what we have come to? What's going on here?"

**Reti:** Yeah, it's very complicated.

**Snowdon:** Yeah. And what was interesting was, they were having their own relationship with those magazines. Just as we had our relationship with them twenty years ago, they were having their relationship. And some of them were, in fact, reading about makeup—but not in slavish devotion to what the magazines were telling them. It's not like they were reading the magazines and becoming these poor, hapless women enthralled with fashion. They were just taking what they needed and liked, and discarding the rest. Having their own relationship with the fashion industry. Having their own relationship.

I'm probably never going to give up my idea that high heels literally make women helpless. They do make women less powerful. And even deform our feet. But I wasn't going to, as a women's center director, allow my feelings about this to affect a relationship of mutual respect and communication with a student who thinks: "I'm wearing them and being subversive. I'm being a feminist who wears high heels. That's my subversive act. Yours was not to wear them at all; mine is to wear them and be a right-on powerful woman."

One workshop we did over and over again—it was very powerful—was a Barbie workshop, where you came and created the Barbie of your dreams. So at one point we had thirty Barbies in the Women's Center in strategic positions. And again, it wasn't like, "Well, a good Barbie out of this process is Barbie wearing androgynous clothing [laughs] with a manifesto for a battered women's shelter in her tiny southern town." I mean, that is a good Barbie, but they had some other good Barbies they were fashioning. And some of the Barbies were not as obviously subversive as Androgynous Barbie with her battered women's shelter manifesto. But they were subversive in their own way, for a new generation.

**Reti:** Well, if I recall, the time period in which you were the director was when this kind of challenging was going on, when women were starting to say: “Look, I can be a feminist and wear makeup.”

**Snowdon:** If you had told me as a feminist fifteen or twenty years before that I would be director of a women’s center offering these programs, some of them I would have lifted my eyebrows at. I’d’ve considered them “insufficiently radical,” or “pandering,” or this, or that—insisting on the purism of yesteryear in the face of the actual student needs of today. [laughs] Not a way to run a good women’s center! But I also thought, Wait a minute—I’m not going to totally, by any means, let go of my background. Before any program or service happens here, I want to run it against my background and just make sure we are not actually, in fact, doing mindless, conventional things, which is the direction this can trend in. And the students would actually say to me, “So, Shane, let’s have a little ‘older feminist run-through’ here. Are there things about any of these programs that trouble you?”

**Reti:** You were only in your late thirties at this point, or early forties.

**Snowdon:** I was turning forty. Which is, of course, way old in this context.

**Reti:** I’ve been through that same thing with the Out in the Redwoods project and my students and having to really be flexible.

**Snowdon:** Oh, yeah. Like the situation of queer students today is very different from the gay and lesbian students of before. Very, very different, as the use of different words implies. Just the fact that at gay and lesbian centers of yesteryear, men and women would always meet separately, while now there’s interest and comfort in meeting together. I mean, that is radical. So when looking at a given program—let’s say the students proposed a program including men—I’d have to ask myself: do I feel that they are including men because they’ve been co-opted, that they’re being insufficiently brave

or visionary or radical? Or do I think that they're including men because [laughs] it makes a lot of sense and it's powerfully right for them? We were very explicit about this. They would come up with all these fabulous, fabulous ideas, and then they'd say, "Okay, Shane. Tell us what you honestly think." And I would not hold back. If I felt like, I don't see how this is different from the mainstream message about food, or relationships, or self-presentation, I would just say so. And sometimes the program would be adapted, and sometimes I would be adapted. [both laugh] It was very rich stuff.

### Erin Ramsden

**Reti:** Please talk about how you worked with the program director, or assistant director—I'm not sure what the term was. I know you had two different people who worked with you, right?

**Snowdon:** Assistant directors. Yeah, my first year, which was a huge period of learning, was with Arlyn [Osborne], who had really held everything together for the year that the previous director was away. And then, after Arlyn moved to Kresge, the next three years were with Erin Ramsden. I really worked with Erin most of my time there. It was an incredible relationship, and one that I really valued then and value now. We happen to complement each other in terms of personality, and also she was very close to the students' age. I don't want to pretend that I started [laughs] with the same degree of acceptance and understanding of twenty-something women that I ended up with. Erin, who was much closer to their age, was an incredibly important bridge. Incredibly important. It was kind of a radical step, hiring as assistant director of a women's center someone who had encountered feminism really recently in her own life. Do professional staff of a women's center have to have had [laughs]  $x$  number of years of involvement in second wave feminism? It was a little bit edgy. I thought: Am I going to be the only person here who has the old-time feminist viewpoint?

**Reti:** Right, carrying the torch.

**Snowdon:** She was a very strong listener, a very open-minded person, really able to hear the students. But she had been involved in global feminism. She was very aware of the situation of women in Asia and Africa. In some countries abroad with which she was familiar, the insights of an earlier feminist day—and I saw this in my own work with Bella—were very powerful, very fresh, very new in those cultures. They were not the same as in the U.S. years before, but you could see the essential power in other countries, as in the U.S. twenty years before, of notions of women's empowerment, of not being defined by the prevailing other. And so Erin, because of her work abroad seeing the power of fundamental notions of feminism, really did deeply get, really had in her bones, a sense of how much value there was in the work of second wave feminism. And on the other hand, she could see the ways in which, and was very interested in encouraging the ways in which, young women could work twenty years later with those insights. Just as empowerment in an African nation is ultimately going to look different from empowerment in the U.S., though based on the same concept of selfhood, she recognized, "Well, actually age can constitute a different country, as well." The fundamental notion was: "Shane, it looked one way for you twenty years ago. It logically, as it does abroad, is going to look different in the lives of women twenty years later, who have been informed by feminism. Don't feel like they're fighting with your old-time feminism. Realize they've been informed by it and are going on from there. Women abroad embraced many of the insights from the U.S., and the fact that they don't live them out identically is nothing to be upset about."

So she was just a fabulous bridge, and she was also extremely energetic, very flexible. Someone who could be there at night. Someone who was happy schlepping things for Take Back the Night marches. A logistical person, as well as someone who could very

fluently introduce our speaker from Nigeria, or the U.S. Congress. Very versatile, very talented, trusted by everyone.

**Reti:** Wow, what a fabulous person to work with!

**Snowdon:** I just feel incredibly blessed. I might have had a very different experience without Erin there to work with. She was great, and we actually left at the same time. A hard thing, and also I guess a helpful thing in some ways, that we both left at the same time. We both felt, like, really wonderful and really exhausted.

### **Deciding to Leave the Women's Center**

**Reti:** Can we talk about your decision to move on?

**Snowdon:** Yeah. I think a lot of it was by then I was commuting ninety miles each way. And there's just no way you can keep doing that.

**Reti:** Oh, because you were actually living up in the Bay Area at that point?

**Snowdon:** Yeah.

**Reti:** Wow, that's insanity.

**Snowdon:** You just can't sustain that, and I had been for two years, and [sighs] it was just hopeless. And I was not in a situation where everyone could move down to Santa Cruz. Even though my partner went to UC Santa Cruz, and would have loved to move down (she has family in Santa Cruz), for various reasons, it wasn't practical. So I had to look for something up north.

But I was very lucky in that an old colleague as a women's center director was heading the search for a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Director at UC San Francisco. So I was able to move into a setting where I really knew the people. I knew something about

working at a UC. And I could continue to work on gender issues. I very much view issues around gender and sexual orientation as all the same work. It's about not being defined by the gender norms of history, about making our own way. It's all of a piece. But I work very little with students now, because as it happens, UC San Francisco has about 3,000 students and about 18,000 staff. So very interestingly . . .

**Reti:** That's ironic—going from one to the other.

**Snowdon:** . . . almost everything I did in Santa Cruz has been not relevant in the specific sense to my work at UC San Francisco. And having worked much less at UC Santa Cruz on staff issues, they're now my life. Almost all of my work is on staff and faculty issues. In that way the two jobs are mirror images. It was not as if I could plug in everything I'd done at UC Santa Cruz. No.

**Reti:** They are absolutely mirror images. That's remarkable.

**Snowdon:** No question. I do think a lot of what we offered for students, if we'd had the money and the space and the time, could have been offered to community women and older women, in the sense of a traditional community women's center—in theory. But when we did some of that for staff women, when we tried replicating the student programs for staff women, because we could see some of them would certainly in theory work for staff women, it was tough scheduling-wise, because staff women wanted to leave campus at five, by and large. And they mostly had very defined lunch hours, and could not get down to the center during lunch hours. Also, community women were hard-pressed to come up to the campus for lunch hour.

But one way that I could make a difference for staff women was by advocating very, very strongly as Women's Center director for Human Resources to intensify hiring efforts in South County. And not just to intensify traditional hiring efforts, but to look at their approach to hiring, so that the campus was as open as humanly possible to non-

traditional applicants. I also did something that was very personally [meaningful to] me. I catalyzed a women's cancer project among staff women that brought together staff women who had cancer in their lives in one way or another.

**Reti:** Was that the beginnings of Womencare?

**Snowdon:** No, Womencare already existed. It was bringing part of it to campus because so many staff women had cancer in their lives. But what we ended up doing, because of the issues of getting down to the Women's Center and even finding a place to eat lunch together on campus, was creating a website and an email network of women on campus who had gone through this. So they could share tips about doctors, and stories about what they had gone through. For staff, we ended up doing more electronically.

**Reti:** So you got around one of the problems of the Women's Center's location by the advent of the virtual space.

**Snowdon:** Right. Email had just kind of arrived when I arrived. One thing that incredibly helped us was email. Whereas before we had been confined to putting up flyers in the colleges and on the bus shelters, we ended up with over 2,000 names on our email list by the time I left. Being able to email students made a huge difference. When you can email to students who are otherwise really hard to reach, that is very, very powerful. I'm not sure, because I wasn't there before, but the Women's Center before might have been influenced by the fact that there was no easy way to reach students, whereas you could mail to community women—they stayed at the same addresses. And it was relatively easier to communicate with staff, too—staff stayed in the same jobs. But students? [groans] Putting stuff in student mailboxes was so hit-or-miss—they don't even look at their mailboxes after a certain point in the year.

**Reti:** It just piles up.



**Snowdon:** Email was a huge help. A big change.

### **Support from University Administration**

**Reti:** What kind of support did you get from the university administration, Student Services?

**Snowdon:** Well, when I came in, I think the gestalt was: we are in tension. And I just decided not to be. You know, life is too short. I don't really see any reason to be in tension until people give me a reason to be in tension. [I had worked in] jails in San Francisco. I had worked with the cancer establishment. I had worked with the cops and the courts in Oakland. So I felt like: okay, if I can find common cause with them and work with them, surely it's not going to prove impossible to work with Student Services on this campus. I did not go in with assumptions, much less with a chip on my shoulder. I don't mean to say that anyone else did. I just tried to be assumption-free, and chip-free. And I thought central administration was really supportive.

But more to the point, central administration doesn't control most of the money going to the Women's Center. It is voted upon by the Student Fee Advisory Committee. So I focused on having a good relationship with the Student Fee Advisory Committee. I really worked, and the student staff really worked, to communicate to them what we were doing. They were hearing it anyway, but we really wanted them to know that we were really trying to be down with students and meet student needs. And they had ahold of the purse strings in the Student Fee Advisory Committee. It wasn't, you know, someone sitting at Hahn.

The way I looked at it, with most of the money coming from the Student Fee Advisory Committee, was: if we have a good relationship with students, our funding isn't really going to be in jeopardy. And in fact, the last year I was there, there was a student

referendum that failed only by a tiny amount that would have given more funding to the Women's Center. They actually each year gave us more and more funding.

No one said to me, when I arrived: "Oh, funding is in the hands of students." But I realized it right away, and thought: Well, there's another reason to be really focusing on student needs, because that's where the funding is. You don't want to be caught up in tangles with central administration when your constituents and your accountability and your funding are very much in the student realm.

And my supervisor throughout was a woman who very readily called herself a feminist...

**Reti:** Who was that?

**Snowdon:** Gail Heit. She was really supportive. She and the central administration seemed to very much have the attitude of "You go!" They featured our work. I had the feeling that they actually read and enjoyed [laughs] my annual reports. They showcased what the Women's Center was doing, not just on campus, but beyond. I had the feeling they were pleased and proud. Now, of course, as a radical, when that happens you have to stop and ask yourself, "Is there something wrong?" [both laugh]

**Reti:** The old radical speaking...

**Snowdon:** Right! You know, if central administration at a bureaucracy seems to be supportive and pleased, what does that mean? But I actually felt, because of who Gail is, her particular background, that she was appreciating genuinely good work from a genuinely good place.

And in addition to Gail, who was just great, the vice chancellor for student affairs when I was there, the whole time I was there, was Francisco Hernandez. He was very encouraging of, very supportive of, both our work in general and things like the

Chicana/Latina Pipeline Project. He was extremely interested in outreach to underserved students. He and we agreed that to be a woman student of color was to be facing a unique and potentially formidable set of challenges. So I think he really valued anything the Women's Center did, whether explicitly for underserved women of color or for women in general, that dealt with challenges to recruitment and retention of women students. I think he understood the needs of women students in general, and, of course, the particular recruitment and retention challenges for women students of color. I had the sense that he felt the Women's Center is really helping our students to feel stronger, clearer, and more powerful in their college careers. And what's not to like about that [laughs], if your thing is recruitment and retention!

So I always felt very well-supported. I mean, one always wishes that central administration would come over and say, "Well, for your efforts, half a million dollars!" But actually, now that I think of it, when I approached them for special funding—when I had a vision for expanded community service, when we had the vision for the Chicana/Latina Pipeline, when we had special projects like the Women of Courage series—I felt central administration really came through, as well as the colleges and the traditional program funding sources. I have to say, and I don't think that this is because I was co-opted [laughs] or the center was co-opted, I have to say that I think we had a really positive relationship. And, to be honest, we might all have been a little surprised by that, because of the stereotype that to be a true feminist you naturally have to be in the face of, and at odds with, a long-standing and conventional bureaucracy.

Of course, I should add that I'm sure we benefited from all the work that Helene and Beatriz and others did over the years to protect the Women's Center, to keep it going and maintain the respect of central administration. I think there is no question we rode on the backs of the lionesses, as I called them, who created and defended the Women's Center.

**Reti:** It seems like the early philosophy or strategy from what I can gather from my reading was kind of, just like slip below the radar screen. Like, "Well, we're just out here on the edge of campus and no one will notice us, and we'll just take this little pot of money." It doesn't seem like that's what you continued.

**Snowdon:** [speaking at the same time] Well, we were doing some radical things. I mean, I can't speak to earlier times, because earlier times are earlier times. But you know, it's not as if we were doing, during my time, risk-free things. I mean, *The Vagina Monologues* were...

**Reti:** They're pretty in-your-face, yes.

**Snowdon:** . . . not necessarily a student affairs vice chancellor's idea of the safest program back then! Like Take Back the Night. And sexuality programs where students were really learning about their sexuality in fun, appealing ways. And programs indicating the degree of eating disorders in the student body. We were doing some very edgy stuff. Very edgy. For example, in preparing women for work we were saying there are special challenges and special issues for young women entering the work world that have got to be addressed, and, by definition, are not being fully addressed, and we will step in and address them. So we would overlap with other units. We took on tough issues. But all of this they seemed comfortable with and supportive about. And, in some cases, they encouraged other campus resources to incorporate what we were doing in their regular routine of services. So actually, through whatever mix of chemistry, timing, luck, I experienced a lot of mutual support.

**Reti:** That's fabulous.

**Snowdon:** Yeah, it was somewhat unexpected. The challenges for me lay elsewhere.

**Reti:** I didn't ask you about burnout. I don't know if you struggled with that. Did you and Erin have strategies for kind of supporting each other, or decompressing? Because you're talking a job that goes into the night, and you know, this is not your normal staff job.

**Snowdon:** Well, no feminist job is famous for self-care, and I think we were no exception. I think we did work too hard at first and did not attend enough to self-care. We were in the ironic situation of producing vast numbers of self-care programs, and, implicit in that, not doing self-care. Erin worked really long days, for example. And I think definitely, like halfway through, we knew we were in the paradox of: wow, we're all about caring for yourself, and feeling strong and powerful, and we are really tired and working very long hours and trying to be everything to everyone.

So there was certainly reassessment. And something I learned from Erin—which she then made this part of our programs, which I thought was cool—were the tools she found in her own life for rejuvenation, for spiritual refreshment. They were very helpful to her. And they were ecumenical. These were not [laughs] “denomination-specific.” These were the classic traditional tools for self-care and for getting in touch with your own nature and with nature in general. She brought those to me and to the rest of the staff, and they really flowed into the programs. Because, of course, our student staff also got excited about how much we were doing and how popular it was . . . . It happens with a lot of student activities up on campus, if they're really wonderful: students start to flow into them in a big way, and other parts of their lives can really suffer. Well, our stuff was no exception, but Erin was able to bring these tools. And then we would have programs around them, without giving them snoozy titles like, “Dealing With Stress as a Busy Student.” We began to have more programs about “How do you find your center?” We had some programs that taught techniques like meditation. And we organized walks in nature. We said to students, “You think you're in nature because you're on the Santa

Cruz campus. You don't know what nature is!" [laughs] So we had times when students would gather for a bonfire and story-sharing on the beach, when they would go on woodland walks, when they would think about the role of the labyrinth and, you know, traditional women's tools for centering and for relating spiritually that have been discredited over the years. These were incredibly popular. And we got these very diverse students sitting in the woods together sharing stories, talking about women's traditional relationship with nature, and how women have become estranged from nature. Oh, I can't believe I forgot these programs earlier, because they were particular favorites of Erin's, and particular favorites of the students. We'd have nighttime hikes—different from Take Back the Night marches—there'd be nighttime hikes where you brought a flashlight, but deliberately turned it off and were just there in the blackness.

**Reti:** Women don't get to do that and feel safe.

**Snowdon:** Right, women don't get to do that! Men, this is routine—you go challenge yourself. But for women to go out on a hillside somewhere, and turn the flashlights off and just be in darkness, was profound. I mean, I think it's profound for anyone, but typically men challenge themselves more physically. We had to watch that we weren't duplicating OPERS, for example, that we were doing something that no one else was doing. But as soon as someone else was doing it, we would say, "More power to you. On to the next thing we haven't had time to do yet!"

**Reti:** [laughs]

**Snowdon:** We had women's rock climbing, and who we pitched it to were not the women who were already rock climbing, because they were already going to the gyms and the OPERS classes. We aimed it at women who didn't think of themselves as the rock climbing kind, who hadn't gone surfing, who weren't into ultimate frisbee, and who thought, "Rock climbing? I don't think so! It isn't me, it's not my people, I don't...."

And yet, there's something about rock climbing—the sheer risk, looking death in the face [laughs]—there's something about the experience of rock climbing that can be really profound, across cultures. And so we did rock climbing for people who don't think of themselves as rock climbers.

**Reti:** Oh, that's great.

**Snowdon:** And the trips were women together, because when, often, you combine men and women and rock climbing, you have that phenomenon where men are more apt physically. They're up there, and the women can feel like idiots and kind of give up. And we talked about that. We created a very trusting environment and said very deliberately, "We've made this women only." So we had rock climbing, and several other physical challenges that women would do together. But again, not replicating a regular program. Doing it for women—and here's where student staff would really have to roll out and know who to reach out to—doing it for women who didn't think of themselves as needing or wanting to take physical risks.

**Reti:** That's so cool.

**Snowdon:** Afterward, wow, those evaluations were some of my favorite ones. I mean, they were amazing. They were just amazing. Literally women saying, "This is maybe the most powerful life experience I ever had. I never thought I would be willing to rappel down. But the women below me were cheering, and I did it!" Just incredible stuff.

This is the thing: women's centers around the country are feeling so beleaguered, and they don't think of a women's center as doing a rock climbing course or a nighttime hike where you turn off the flashlights. But when you go out and say, "Hey, rock climbing—nighttime hike!" they go "Ohhhh, right, that's what we're trying to do with the lunchtime consciousness-raising group!" Same goal. Same goal, but no one's coming to the lunchtime consciousness-raising group. "How about a women's night at the gym?"

How about a hike without lights? Especially in a nearby park?" It's not Take Back the Night. It's not that labor-intensive. It's just being in darkness and not flipping out. Or starting to flip out, but, you know, talking about it. Night is a very gendered phenomenon, interestingly. And then they go, "Whoa, maybe there is a fresh field to be plowed by women's centers." By the time I left, I was feeling really creative, both at Santa Cruz and in terms of the possibilities around the country for young women. I feel that again, as I talk with you. And, actually, since then, women's centers are doing a lot more of these kinds of programs.

I think the only peril in having talked so much about the students is that we did also work with the community, and we did work with staff, and we did work with faculty, and we've talked less about that. There was joy associated with those other enterprises, but there was a lot of joy in working with students and doing things that had literally never been done before. And discovering that the old mantra "Young women today don't care about feminism, whether you call it feminism or you don't" is really not true. That being strong, being self-aware, being centered, will always, always have appeal. That people will be drawn to that, if you present it to them in very clean, clear ways.

**Reti:** I think that's a great place to stop. Thank you, Shane.



## Roberta Valdez



Roberta Valdez Photo: UCSC Photo Services

*Roberta Valdez is the current director of the Women's Center, where she has been since August 1, 2000. Previously she founded two women's organizations, a chapter of an anti-racist women's organization called Sisters and Allies in the Bay Area, and Rural Women's Resources in Ukiah in Mendocino County, California. She was also the only Latina elected official during her term on the school board in Mendocino County in the 1990s. Valdez has steered the Women's Center into the 21st century, initiating innovative programs like the 51 Percent Project, keeping the center going during recent budget cuts and reorganizations, and re-visioning the center's vision statement. In addition, Valdez has provided support for this oral history project, demonstrating a keen sense of the singular history of the UCSC Women's Center. I interviewed Roberta Valdez on November 24 and December 13, 2004 in the Regional History office at McHenry Library. —Irene Reti*

### Early Background

**Reti:** Roberta, let's start with some basic background about you, like where you were born, where you grew up, so we have some context for your work at the Women's Center.

**Valdez:** I was born in Stockton, California. My family, my mom and dad, lived in Tracy, but Stockton was the closest hospital. I'm the oldest of six children. I was the first, [and was born] in 1948. Probably three years after I was born, my sister Mary was born. Right after Mary was born, my family moved to Roseville, California, and then to Sacramento. By the time I was four or five, we were living in Sacramento, and that's where my family still is. I was raised in Sacramento.

**Reti:** You're a California girl.

**Valdez:** I'm a California girl. My dad is actually *Californio*, because his family was here when this was part of Alta California in Mexico, and my mom is from Minnesota, Minneapolis. I feel the *Californio* heritage, and claim it proudly.

I went to the same Catholic elementary school from first through eighth grade, and then right next-door was the Catholic all-girls high school in Sacramento, so I went there for four years. And then two years at a community college in Sacramento, and then I went to San Jose State as a transfer student. I didn't know that term at the time. I am a transfer student, or was back then.

A little piece about being at San Jose State is that when I went to San Jose State, my boyfriend at the time, somebody that I'd met at community college, became a student here at UC Santa Cruz, so I used to hitch-hike over the hill. He was a Merrill [College] student. There was only one entrance to the college and it was there in front of Merrill. I vividly remember dropping him off and loving this campus. That was in 1968.

**Reti:** Oh my goodness. The really early days.

**Valdez:** The early days. When I'd come over to visit him on weekends sometimes they would be invited to go to the provost's house and have dinner, and sit around and drink wine, and just philosophize and talk. This was a pretty significant place, in that my mind

really opened, more so here, doing those kinds of things, than even in classes at San Jose State, or American River, where I went to junior college. So I have a history that dates back to 1968 with this place. I found it really special and influential to me back then, and then to wind up here, thirty-seven years later, is pretty amazing.

I am the oldest of six. There are four daughters and two sons in my family. My mom is an educator. She was a teacher all the time that I was growing up, and my dad was a butcher. Early when I was younger, he had shops, one in Roseville, and then later he worked for markets like Safeway or Lucky Stores. He died, I think, six years ago now. My mom is still alive at eighty-two, living in Sacramento, where four of my brothers and sisters are. And my brother just moved to Santa Barbara. I have two children. My son Emiliano is almost thirty. In a couple weeks he'll be thirty years old. He's an alum of UC Santa Cruz. And my daughter Maya is twenty-four, and she's also an alum here.

**Reti:** My goodness.

**Valdez:** Emiliano, I think only applied to Santa Cruz. He may have applied to some state colleges. He's not a scholar, was not a disciplined high school student academically, and got into UC Santa Cruz as a Bridge student. He had an amazing experience. Do you know Ekua Omosupe?

**Reti:** Oh, sure.

**Valdez:** Ekua was his Bridge teacher.<sup>1</sup>

**Reti:** Oh, that's really great.

**Valdez:** I met her, went to a class one time when we were visiting him, and was so blown away. She influenced him so much. Just lit his mind on fire. I had been living in Ukiah—

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<sup>1</sup>The Summer Bridge Program, run by SAA/EOP, helped incoming students develop college-level skills before starting their freshmen year.

that's where my daughter was born and where Emiliano and I moved when he was four years old—a small, rural town. Both of my kids had good educations, because the school systems were small enough, and people knew them. But when he came here, he described it as his mind being on fire. And she lit that fire, initially, for him. So there were those two connections before I even considered being here on campus. Emiliano, I think came here in 1992 or 1993, and then Maya was five years later.

**Reti:** What were you doing right before you came here?

**Valdez:** Right before I came here I'd been working for the Mendocino County Office of Education. I ran two projects that were funded by the State Department of Education for families that have young children. I was in charge of a whole region, so I went from Mendocino County, Sonoma County, up to the Oregon border, training teachers and training classified staff in how to do the work of these two programs. One was called A Healthy Start, and the other one was an Even Start Family Literacy program. I did that for seven years, worked at the County Office of Education. Right before that I had worked for a couple years at Mendocino College, which is a community college in Ukiah, as the assistant in a learning center. We provided tutorial services, and did preliminary placement testing for all students in math and English. Those were the two things I did right before [I came to UCSC].

**Reti:** So how did you hear about the job here, and what made you decide to apply for it?

**Valdez:** Maya was a student here, my daughter Maya, and we had just gotten a new computer. She was home in Ukiah, and I was with her fiddling around on the [UC] Santa Cruz website. I thought, let's just look and see what kind of jobs are here? And I saw the Women's Center Director position. I think that the deadline was maybe ten days away

from the time that I was looking at it. I said to my husband, "What do you think about me applying for this job in Santa Cruz?"

**Reti:** (laughs) Wow!

**Valdez:** He doesn't believe in, or doesn't look at the world as I do in terms of fate or serendipity or even, you know, miracles, those kinds of things. I actually didn't think much about it, but I had some experience because I'd been the founding mother of two women's organizations, one in the Bay Area and one in Ukiah in Mendocino County. So I . . .

**Reti:** Tell me a little bit more about that before we get to you applying for the director job at the Women's Center.

**Valdez:** Okay, so I had been working in the library in Mendocino County and met a woman named Rebecca Sanrich. She was older than me and had passed through the women's movement. There's a large community of women in Mendocino County who had been successful in their work, and also had been really strong feminists during the women's movement. I met her. We became friends. She wanted to start an educational and cultural non-profit organization, and she did it very thoughtfully. She wanted women of color represented; she wanted sexual preferences represented; she wanted all ages represented. So she picked and chose, and invited women to participate in the formation of this non-profit. So she and I, and an older woman who since died, became the original board and submitted the papers for incorporation. It was called Rural Women's Resources, Inc. We did concerts. We had Holly Near and Ronnie Gilbert. We had educational workshops, and we published a newsletter on women's issues. We supported some women who were filing a class action suit against a union. The Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Union in Lake County owned this resort, and there were seven women that were fired or asked to leave their jobs because the owners wanted to

hire men to work in this restaurant. They wanted a certain décor, you know, Italian. The owners wanted males because they thought males represented better the Italian culture in a fancy dining hall. So we became the fired women's supporters, and put out newsletters and information about these women, and we raised money to support their class action lawsuit. And so, that was Rural Women's Resources. It lasted a number of years, until Rebecca had to leave the state to go back to be with her mother who was aging, and ultimately died. But myself and a Native American woman, and another Chicana, and this older woman, Jean Pape, carried on the organization for a couple more years, and then it became clear that Rebecca was the moving force and without her . . . as we all worked and had families, and she was a single woman . . . What's left of the organization is in a file cabinet in my house in Ukiah, everything about it.

So that was one experience that I had in Ukiah, founding this organization and working among women. I was recognized in the community as a leader. I was an elected official and, as far as I know, the only Latina elected to any position in Mendocino County, and definitely the only Latina on the school board that I was elected to. So all of that, with the work with other women's organizations, traditional ones, like the Soroptimists and other groups, I had a fair amount of experience working with women's organizations.

Then when I was working for the library literacy program, I met a woman in the Bay Area—because there were a number of Northern California directors of library literacy programs—I met a woman, an African American woman, who was a director in East Palo Alto of a program, and we became friends. She went to a training that was sponsored by the Bay Area Black Women's Health Initiative. She came back from this training saying the trainer was fabulous, that they were going to start this new organization that brought not only black women together, but all women of color and white women as allies together. She said (Marcella is still a friend of mine), "If we're going to become friends you *must* do this."

**Reti:** (laughs) Whoa!

**Valdez:** I believed her, because we were all looking at racism. We were doing some work together. We gathered women who were directors of programs, and we did what had been called in the past consciousness-raising groups. But we were looking at racism. We did a whole weekend retreat that was at a place that my family had on the Mendocino coast, and we transcribed this weekend retreat where all these women of color came together and talked about . . . My work was mostly focused on racism and class, as opposed to feminism.

I went to a first meeting with some people that were forming this organization, and who were related to the people in the Bay Area Black Women's Health Initiative who had brought this woman, Lily Allen, out to do a training. I started driving down to the city once a month and meeting with these women. It was mostly women of color, but there were some white women, and the ages were varied. There were lesbian women, straight women, bi women, so it was the kind of group that I liked, that I felt good and comfortable in. They were dealing with issues of racism and healing from that, with the philosophy that it starts within yourself, examining your own prejudices and where racism and classism and those things are seated (or seeded) in us. That ended up being an organization called Sisters and Allies that I was a part of for two years. It ended up in a huge conference that still is going on. Sisters and Allies is still going on and has a staff. Some of the original founding women are part of that.

**Reti:** I'll have to check that out.

**Valdez:** Yeah, there's a local group called Women as Allies that I also have been involved in. I actually got those two groups hooked up together, but Sisters and Allies is quite remarkable in its longevity and its intention. I'm a part of a local group that is continuing that work, because Lily Allen, who's the influential person that was the trainer we

initially worked with, still works with Sisters and Allies, and now is influencing a local group that I'm a part of. So after many years of not seeing Lily, I spent a day with her about a month ago because she came at the invitation of this local group. It's a mixed group of men and women, but it's also remarkable. So I've worked in the company of women. I've worked promoting women. Where I started from and where I still start from is really racism and classism, as opposed to feminism.

### **Applying for the Directorship of the UCSC Women's Center**

**Reti:** Okay, let's get back to the moment when you thought about applying for the Women's Center job. To many women of color, feminism is seen a white thing.

**Valdez:** Yes.

**Reti:** Did you see your work on racism and classism as being something separate from feminism? Did you think you were going to have to step away from that work in order to work at the Women's Center?

**Valdez:** I didn't see it as separate, but I had not ever called myself feminist. That word, you know, maybe it was used in the woods with women who'd come out of the movement and now were living back-to-the-land and writing and doing work up there, who had been major forces in the women's movement in the Bay Area and elsewhere—they might have used the word. But even Rebecca, who was a part of that movement, never used the word "feminism," that I recall, in our work together. If I had heard that word, I probably wouldn't have . . . I might have gone, because I loved her, and I liked the work that we were doing, but it wasn't the thing that motivated me.

And even when I came here, it was . . . I have another thing in my life that is kind of comparable, and that is that . . . well, first of all, let me just say that it was uncomfortable



for me because this center, and all women's centers in the UC system, have a feminist tradition that's very strong. It's palpable and has a public image. Some people are turned off by it, and some people have embraced it and grown it, and nurtured it. So I stepped into that place, not having that cloak on, and wondering if I'd ever feel comfortable wearing that garment, and had to do a little kind of . . . I guess aligning myself, and thinking about the work that I'd done, and thinking about me, and who I represented, and coming to some kind of settling with the idea that I'm a feminist. Because it *was* a white thing. I mean, I remember one particular incident where the sister of a friend of mine came over to my house when I was living in Sacramento. She was a businesswoman. She was a mother. She came in after a party and she said, "They're burning their bras. I'm going to go out and burn my bra!" She was all worked up, and I had no idea what she was talking about. That was the first thing that I knew about the women's movement, really, although I bought the first issue of *Ms.* magazine, when it was first published. But the term was not... It wasn't mine. I was interested in what I was reading. I was interested in what was happening. But it was somebody else. It wasn't me. Because mostly I'd worked in communities of color, and it wasn't a topic of discussion.

So when I came here there was a little alignment that had to happen, and it happened really slowly. I had that sense sometimes that somebody's going to find out that I'm not feminist, and what the hell am I doing here at the Women's Center which has this reputation, and this campus in particular, because it's been so activist? The history of the founding of the center is all of these fabulous feminists, people that easily profess . . . So I had to settle in, and it took me a couple years to see that. It was kind of artificial. I felt

like I had to make myself fit something, but that's not true. What I had to do was just accept all of who I am and what I'd been doing, and that is clearly what people in the feminist movement were about. So there wasn't any real separation. It was just a little artificial thing in my mind about it.

**Reti:** Okay. So you heard about the job, and you decided to apply for it . . .

**Valdez:** I said, I'm going to apply for it. So I gathered all my stuff. I Fed-Exed it down here, because it might not even have been ten days. It might have been five days. I got together copies of *Rural Women's Resources*, the newsletter, pictures of me in the paper receiving women's awards for work as a woman working with women, my resume which had a lot of administrative . . . I've been an administrator all my working life. I've managed programs. I've managed grants. I've written grants. So I had a lot of administrative skills, and then these other things looked like I had a lot of work with women. So I put it together and forgot about it really. Because I had a great job. I loved what I was doing there. I was living with my husband, and we had a house. My kids were here and we'd come down and visit them and things were just . . . So I forgot about it.

Then I got a postcard from staff HR that said "I'm sorry. Your resume, your [application] wasn't accepted." The reason was that in the HR [application] I had transposed numbers. They had so many . . . They had 200 applications. They just went through and they'd used all the criteria. My numbers were transposed. They put it in an out-basket and never looked at it. So about probably a month or two later, I decided to go back and look at the website again. The first deadline had passed, and now there was a new deadline on the same job. So I called staff HR and I said, "I sent my application in a while ago for this job. What do you do with all these applications?" She went through some

wastebasket or file, and she goes, "Well here it is." I said, "You know, the problem with it was that there were numbers transposed." She said, "Oh, I'll fix that." So she fixed it, and put it back in the inbox. (both laugh)

**Reti:** Bureaucracy.

**Valdez:** It was total serendipity. It was one of those things. What I haven't said is that since my experience here in 1968 with visiting Peter, Santa Cruz had been a destination for camping at Henry Cowell [State Park] and Sunset Beach all the time my kids were growing up. I love the Boardwalk. I just love the beauty of this place and the air. Visually, this place is just like a treat to me. Over the years when we were visiting the kids I would say to [my husband] Jim, "Wouldn't you like to move down here?" When Emiliano was in school here we looked at maybe buying a place that he could live in. Things were really expensive then (but they were like a third of what they are now) so we never bought anything. Then Maya came down here, and we'd come visit her and walk on West Cliff [Drive] and I'd say, "Well, don't you really want to live here?" There was no pressure. It was just a yearning to live here.

**Reti:** A dream.

**Valdez:** So I got an interview for the job. I was one of two finalists. Kathleen Hughes was one, and I was the other. I came down for the interview. Nancy Kim was the chair of the search committee. Lauren Green was on the committee. She's still here. Helen [Mayer] was a staff person. I'm not sure whether she was a committee member or not, but she was there. There were students. Another staff member, who's no longer here, was on the committee. So I ended up sitting in the conference room at the Women's Center, being interviewed by these ten or twelve people, and then going home and thinking, "Well,

that's nice." I mean, I like interviews. I do pretty well in interviews. So it was fun. I had nothing invested in it, nothing.

**Reti:** (laughs) That's when things happen.

**Valdez:** I know it! I was totally happy where I was. I was making \$10,000 more than I'm making here at my other job.

**Reti:** That's amazing. Salaries aren't very high in Mendocino County.

**Valdez:** They're not very high, but it was \$10,000 more than I'm making here. So I mean, except for the yearning to be here, I had nothing, really . . . Except then I got called back and at that point it was Kathleen and myself. I went to the Women's Center and waited outside while she did her community meeting interview. I saw her leave, and then I went in and did it. I was shuttled around by this really great student. I met John Holloway, who was the executive director [of Student Development and Community Services]. I had a really nice time. But again, I didn't have anything really invested in it. I loved the place. I could imagine myself coming to work in that building.

Then I got offered the job. It didn't seem like it was a really hard decision. My husband has faults, but one of them is not holding me back. I know what's good for me, and I try and include him in my dreams. So we talked about it. I said, "What do you think?" and he said, "Well, it's up to you." I said, "I think I'm going to take it." So I took the job. I thought that he was going to be right behind me. Like next year, he might transition from his job and come down. But it's been four and a half years and he's not here so... and it's still working out.

**Reti:** So you're going back and forth?

**Valdez:** Yes. More him here than me there. I like the job a lot! I mean, it's not even a job, really. It's a pleasure supporting young women, nurturing their energy, and their intelligence, and their enthusiasm, and helping them . . . Not even helping them, but just saying *yes*. That's what I think about my job, is that I get to say yes to young women every day. Which, when I think about my college experience, there were a few people that were like that to me. They were men, and not women, because there weren't a lot of women in departments that I was studying in.

**Reti:** What were you studying in college?

**Valdez:** Anthropology. I mean, there were women, and they were memorable. When I see now what women now, faculty members here, have to do to hang on to survive, I can only imagine that those few women in those times in the seventies were *really* working to hold on. In grad school I didn't have a single woman teacher.

**Reti:** And were you also in anthropology in grad school?

**Valdez:** I was in education and social sciences, which was anthropology in my mind. A mixture of education [and] anthropology. I was in programs that were training people to go into multicultural bilingual education. The administrators were men. The faculty were men. At both of the graduate colleges . . .

**Reti:** At San Jose State?

**Valdez:** No. I went to New Mexico Highlands University, a Teacher Corps program. I did some anthropological field work after getting my B.A. in anthropology. I went to Mexico with one of my professors for the summer. Then I went in the fall to New Mexico Highlands University, and then left New Mexico and came back to Sacramento with my son, and went into a grad program there in the education department.

**Reti:** At Sacramento State?

**Valdez:** Yes.

### **Arriving at the Women's Center**

**Reti:** So when you first came to the Women's Center, when you were first starting this job, what challenges faced you?

**Valdez:** This is an immense, complex institution. Immense compared to anything that I'd ever worked at before, a small community college, county office of education, nonprofits. It seemed in one way very welcoming, and in another way, very cold to me. I like to take my time and do lots of investigation, and laying the groundwork, and reaching out. One of my strengths, I think, is networking and liking to work collaboratively. So I'd make forays out, or people would meet me. I'd try to make those connections to do work together, and to learn about the university. I soon felt like it was going to be never-ending, because of the complexity here. And the other thing that I felt really clearly was . . . even though as a parent of students here, both my kids, I heard faculty say to them, "Door's always open. Come in and talk to me. Want to get you through here. We want you to think of yourself as a scholar, go on to a Ph.D.," all of that stuff . . . People were friendly, but what I've come to find is that they don't have the time because their jobs are so intense. I felt this caste system really quickly, between faculty, staff . . . It was intense. I had never experienced . . . I must have experienced it [before] somehow in more small and subtle ways, but I had a lot of enthusiasm. I wanted to know about this institution before I did big things, to get a sense of it.

**Reti:** I remember seeing you at all kinds of different community events and campus events. I remember being struck by how much you were getting out, and feeling impressed by that.

**Valdez:** Well, I love learning. I like to know my surroundings. Part of what I bring to jobs has been, well here's a resource, and here's a resource, and here's somebody that needs

something. I call it alchemy, and I've thought of myself as an alchemist in my past work. When I introduced myself to my new colleagues here in group meetings that John would have, I would say that about myself. It became clear that you can do that on a small scale here, but the way that I thought that the university would embrace somebody working at the Women's Center, where over fifty percent of the students are women, it just was like, not happening. I think that there's a lot of pressure on people, and little time, and their jobs are really big. I've come to think of it like that, rather than, "No! We don't want to work with you!" So that was a huge challenge, coming to grips with that. It was palpable. The caste system here was palpable, and I did not get it for two years.

Then I had staff challenges. There are only two [staff members] at the Women's Center, and I don't really want to go into the dynamics of that, but there was a difficult staffing situation at the Women's Center.

I'm a quick study. So I pretty much got the budget, and the first year that I was here I got the programming piece, because I was used to doing that. So small things where people were saying, "Do you want to do this in collaboration?" worked out. We put on a major conference the first year, the first Expanding Your Horizons in Science and Math Conference for high school girls. And now we're doing the fifth annual, so that was good.

### **Re-establishing the Board**

I think one of the main things that I did that I'm really . . . Intuitively, I knew I needed and wanted support, but also, historically the Women's Center had had a board of directors. I don't know that it operated much when Shane was here. But I know how I like to work, and so I reconvened that board in the fall. I started August 1, 2000. In September we had a board meeting, and people like Marge [Frantz] and Bettina

[Aptheker] who had been board members came. More than anything, they came to resign, because they were tired and didn't want to keep doing it. They were doing other things. I think that a lot of people also just wanted to check me out, to see who I was. Whose hands were they leaving the center in? I think that a lot of people came to do that, and then they left. But we did have a fall open house in October, which is a tradition that we've carried on. Marge spoke, and I think Bettina [Aptheker] was there, and Helene Moglen spoke, and my boss [John Holloway] was there, and Beatriz [Lopez-Flores]. I invited Beatriz back and so she came. I met people who'd had a history with the Women's Center. They came: community members, and grad students, and faculty, and staff.

I think in the short period of time, making those connections with people who'd had a history and bridging my newness, and using the board as a vehicle to get solid was really... I mean, that's how I work, non-solitarily, with other people. When I first came for my interview, I had already looked at some of the founding mothers' documents, the statement of purpose, and some of the things that . . . I wanted to carry that on. I also wanted to do new things and make the center . . . My boss, John Holloway said, "You make this center your own." It took me a couple years to do that because of all of the flux, and the newness of it, but I think that establishing the board was a really big step. Re-establishing and reconstituting the board was a big step in that way. It had been an important tradition. It had been the vehicle that helped bridge the community.

**Reti:** Yes. So were you able to recruit new board members from both the community and on campus?

**Valdez:** Yes. There's one community member who's been on the board since way before . . . She is a very active person in the community, but she loves the opportunity to make this connection with the university, which is I think what motivates a lot of people. They have a curiosity about the university and this is a way to step into it. So we have about a



third community members, a third staff, and a third students, including our interns. I've asked the Women's Center interns each year to serve as board members.

**Reti:** That's a change from the past, to have that many students on the board, if I understand correctly.

**Valdez:** There were designated seats, if I remember those documents, there were so many seats for different . . . And it may be more.

**Reti:** Not that there weren't students on the board before, but the larger representation of students.

**Valdez:** They have a vested interest, and we learn from what they know about being students on the campus. The first couple years we didn't have students. We had one or two, but now we have four paid interns, and there've been community studies interns working out of the Women's Center on a project that we umbrella called the Inside-Out Writing Project. Those community studies interns have also served as board members when they've been involved in the project. So maybe up to six students. The board is probably about fifteen people right now.

**Reti:** That seems like a great opportunity for students too, to get that kind of experience of being on a board.

**Valdez:** There's a[n] organization on campus, Student's Voices on Committees (SVOC), and there are maybe hundreds of opportunities for students to serve on various boards on the campus. I signed us up. So when students want to get involved, they can come and look at all of these opportunities and make a choice. The Women's Center is one of those choices, although nobody through that avenue has wound up at the Women's Center. But you know, when you can serve on the Chancellor's Committee, or some

academic committee . . . There are lots of students doing volunteer work on campus. I'm happy to have the students that we have involved.

## Programming

**Reti:** So let's talk about some of the projects you took on. You talked about the conference. Was that your idea?

**Valdez:** No, it wasn't. It was this board member's idea. Maybe the second board meeting that we had . . . I had been involved in putting on Take Your Daughters to Work up at the county office of education. I initiated that up there, still not thinking of myself as a feminist, but doing these things because they made sense to me. I wanted to do that here, so I was floating the idea to the board, and Sheila DeLaney, who is on the board said, well, she'd heard about this other project. In fact it had happened once on this campus. Pamela Peterson and some other high-ranking administrators and people in science had put this conference on. It was about five or seven years before we did our first one. I think that my job is to look at areas like women in science and math and technology and lend support, because they have little support. The same with women in sports or women in arts. I feel like I need to look at these little enclaves and do what we can. So I thought that it was a great idea. That's one project. On March 5th, 2005 we'll do the fifth annual. It draws about 200 young women and about twenty or twenty-five parents and teachers. There are fifteen workshops given by women who are involved in a profession or research arena, and we have a plenary speaker. Marsha McNutt has spoken. The chancellor has spoken. We've had people from out of the area, high-ranking women in science, and women who've done research on women in math, science... This year we have a woman, African American woman who works with NASA. She's an engineer. And Delaine Eastin, who was the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of California, is going to speak to parents and teachers, and then do the final plenary, because she really wants to talk to girls. So that's one major project.

Every quarter, I meet with the Northern California UC Women's Center Directors. Amy Levine from San Francisco, who's been there twenty-three years, she grew up in [their] Women's Center. A huge, wonderful program but that's all graduate programs. And Robin Whitmore, who's been eighteen or nineteen years at UC Davis as the Women's Center Director. The woman from Berkeley, and then the woman from Santa Barbara, Dee Acker, who's been there for probably seventeen or eighteen years—maybe not that long. She comes up and we sit and meet every quarter. What I've seen, in terms of transitioning—and this is happening to me also, and I don't think it's just because we have less money—instead of having lots of individual programs that draw anywhere from five to sixty people, people are working on initiatives like the EYH program, that involves grad students and undergraduate students here, as well as people from the community. We're starting to do more of those kinds of initiatives, even though we did probably eight or nine programs this quarter. I'm seeing that the lack of money, energy, the small draw, all of those things . . . We'll still do programs, but not as many.

I don't know how this happened, but before I got there, the nine months that there [was] no director, there were an enormous number of programs. I think a lot of them were co-sponsored. A lot of them weren't successful, and a lot of them were successful. But for me what's important is quality, as opposed to quantity. I said that, even without knowing that, in my interview process. I wanted to do conscious programming, and that meant quality to me. So that's how I'm moving with the programming aspect of it. We collaborated with women's studies this year to have Marjorie Agosin, who is a visiting professor that Bettina invited, who's a Chilean-American woman, teaches at Wellesley, but had this amazing collection of *arpilleras*, which were, do you know what they are?

**Reti:** No.

**Valdez:** They're pieces of scraps of cloth that are made into little pictures. They're scenes from the Pinochet era of Chile that women hand-sewed, depicting torture, and family

members' disappearances, and various oppressions that were happening during that era. They're on these pieces of scraps of cloth. So those were exhibited at the Women's Center in the fall, and Marjorie talked about the *arpilleras* and the movement that happened in Chile where they were being made by groups of women.

And we just had a fabulous young woman named Amy Lee Campbell come and talk about her book that she wrote about Ruth Bader Ginsburg's founding of the ACLU Women's Rights Project. Brilliant young woman. She just *loves* constitutional law. It's so heavy. It's so deep, and she's just like, "Yes! Constitutional law!"

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Valdez:** And she's not a legal person. She's just a young scholar who worked on her Master's degree doing this. I still want to do fun things like that. And then the students will do their own programming. They'll do *The Vagina Monologues*, and Take Back the Night, and have Good Vibrations come down and do workshops. I do have some contacts with some faculty that I really cherish. Beth Stephens in the art department, she and Annie Sprinkle are doing an event next quarter. But I'm thinking next year we're going to do less programming.

**Reti:** So tell me about these initiatives.

**Valdez:** Last year, a student intern who I hired specifically to work on women and sports, put on a conference. She called it Women Athletes at Heart. It was a morning and an afternoon of lots of discussions and talk about how women haven't always been able to go out and be on teams or think of ourselves as athletes. That's part of a national Girls and Women in Sports Day. Several women's organizations have come together to sponsor this, probably for twenty years or twenty-five years. Billie Jean King started one of them. I think the Girl Scouts are involved. Now I'm part of OPERS, because my boss,

John Holloway left. So SOAR [Student Organization Advising and Resources], and Deb Abbott, and myself ended up being supervised by people at OPERS. Kathleen is . . .

**Reti:** Kathleen [Hughes] is now your boss!

**Valdez:** Yes. We love it. She's fabulous! She's so fabulous. She's taught me so much, and she's so supportive. So there's a great opportunity for us to support the women who are athletes, or women who are doing intra-murals, or in clubs.

**Reti:** Oh, I see, because you're part of OPERS now (laughs). That's great.

**Valdez:** Yeah, it's really fabulous. Because before I even came here, I struggled with that part of myself, always wanting to have been athletic. But when I was in high school with nuns, you weren't supposed to sweat. We dressed in these little skirt things with bloomers and we square danced once in a while, but we didn't have tennis courts, or swimming pools, or competitive teams. We didn't have anything. We just square-danced with the nuns. (laughs)

**Reti:** Things changed a lot, because about fifteen years later, I was at a Catholic high school, and we did have swimming pools and tennis courts. A lot changed, even in those fifteen, twenty years.

**Valdez:** Yeah. Well, my sisters who came behind me had opportunities, and they were only five or nine years behind me. They played tennis, and they played softball. But I was an active kid. I liked to ride my bike. I liked to run. But we just did it as kids. Then puberty set in, and somewhere it just stopped. It just stopped. So I always mentally struggled with that, and liked being physical, but didn't have any venue. Even when I was jogging, I was a closet jogger. It was not showing people that you are in sweatpants, or not running because if you ran down the street people thought you might be in trouble. It was really weird, being a runner, or wanting to be, in a period when jogging

was just starting. People on the streets running, adults on the track who weren't part of a team. I love the idea of promoting women as physically fit, active beings. It's really important. So we're going to do a conference this year for National Girls and Women in Sports Day. That's an initiative. And then we'll maybe do things throughout the year also, next year, to build up to that, do it and then continue to do... I want to acknowledge all of the scholar athletes that are on all of the teams.

### **The 51 Percent Project**

That's one thing. The other initiative that is starting now we're calling the 51% Project. Did you go to Washington, D.C. last spring for the march?

**Reti:** No, I didn't.

**Valdez:** I didn't either, but we had three students from the Women's Center that went. We helped them raise money and make contacts. I watched the whole thing on television.

**Reti:** Tell me more about what the march was about.

**Valdez:** It was a march for women's health and safety. Probably a million people converged on Washington, D.C. last spring.<sup>2</sup> Santa Cruz had a large number of local community women and students who went back there to participate. It changed their lives, seeing the number of men and women, mostly women, expressing their desire for safety and for choice. It was televised, the day of the march. And everybody, Hilary Rodham Clinton, and all of the young speakers, everybody said, "Women need to get out and vote. They need to have their voice out there, and voting is the way to do it." But not a single person said, "A woman needs to run for political office. You need to be

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<sup>2</sup>Valdez is referring to the March for Women's Lives which took place on April 25, 2004 in Washington, D.C.

candidates, and run for political office.” Because we’re fifty-one percent of the population, and we’re fifty-eighth in the world in terms of parity with women and men in elected offices. It’s stunning. It’s just stunning. So there was a woman who helped me last year with the Expanding Your Horizons in Science and Math conference. She came back from that march and said, “We need to have young women think of themselves as potential candidates and elected officials.” I said, “You’re right.” So we’ve started this project and it’s in the planning phases now. We’ve had one event this year. What we’re doing is going out and interviewing women who are in elected positions now, or who have been candidates, or who have run candidate campaigns, to get information about what their path was, and also what women need to know in order to be a candidate and then to be in an elected office. We have a set of questions that we’ve taken out to ask people. The information will help us form a curriculum. Next year we’re going to have an application process and have up to twenty interns do, for credit or not, this leadership program, where they come on a Friday night and all day Saturday, and we learn from other women who are in these positions what it’s like, what you have to know, including public speaking and fund development, how to get a bill passed, or Robert’s Rules of Order, or parliamentary process—all of those things that are the nuts and bolts. Plus, women’s history in the country in terms of our experiences. We’re designing a curriculum to use throughout the year.

**Reti:** This would be for UCSC students, as interns, to get academic credit?

**Valdez:** Yes. We’ve had one event already where we used this interview format. We had Emily Reilly come, and we interviewed her. She just took it away. She’s a very charismatic, lovely person and very smart. She engaged everybody, and we had this wonderful dialog about her path to involvement, and her wisdom about being involved and what it takes. She said, “You can’t be an activist when you’re a candidate, or when you’re [an] elected official, because you have to represent all people and all perspectives,

so you have to be a good listener.” So those are important things to know when you want to go out and make change. Because you can be an activist, or you could take that activism, and with some more skills, be a great representative. So we had that event with Emily. We’re going to do another event interviewing, I think, Gayle Ortiz from Capitola, and Cynthia Matthews, who are both now elected officials. Then in May we’re going to have a conference where we have a couple of workshops, and keynote speakers and a panel discussion of women involved in politics. And then have the program with the students start next fall, but continue, annually, to do this conference that anybody could come to, students and community members. So that’s another initiative.

**Reti:** That is so fantastic. And it seems to come partially out of your own experience of having run for elected office.

**Valdez:** It does. It’s really amazing, because everything that we know about women who run for politics was my experience. Mostly men start early. They’re in their thirties when they first run. Women, it isn’t until they’re in their forties or later that they run for political office. We come to it by being activist and involved in our communities, having name recognition, and being seen as somewhat influential in certain arenas, and therefore people think that you’d make a good candidate. So there’s no real prep that anybody really goes through. I liked my experience of being a candidate more than I actually liked being the elected official, because I realized how limiting it was. It wasn’t *easy*, but I liked representing people a lot. But when you’re running as a candidate, people are going, “Yeah!”

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Valdez:** Then you get elected, and you sit down at the table once a month, and there’s nobody around! They’re really for you getting elected, or not, but in terms of decision-making, you have to... I mean, people just go back to their lives. I didn’t like that at all! I



was on a board that was very acrimonious, very in the public [eye] a lot with bad stuff—like somebody punching the superintendent out at a public meeting. It was kind of weird. It went to court, and some of the board members under oath lied.

**Reti:** Wow. So what other initiatives do you have going?

**Valdez:** Well, next year a big thing that I'm going to focus on—it's not an ongoing initiative—but it is the twentieth anniversary of the Women's Center. I want to do something very special all fall. This project is a part of that, the oral history.

### **Developing Visibility**

I do want to say one other thing. Since I've been here, there hasn't been a Committee on the Status of Women. Gwendolyn Mink was the last chair or convener of that group and I guess something political happened, and then it went away. I kept approaching Leslie Sunell and trying to get that on the agenda again, because I need and want to connect more with women in academics. I don't necessarily want to do a lot of programming with them, but I'm wondering how the Women's Center can be more supportive, and more visible, to women faculty. And grad students. We've had a little connection with the graduate student union in the past. It was developing, and then there was a change in their leadership. But two focuses for future initiatives would be grad students and faculty.

**Reti:** UCSC is developing more graduate programs rather rapidly.

**Valdez:** Yes. The Ph.D. in women's studies. There's a graduate program in social documentation. Those are the two that I'm familiar with. And the school of engineering has more and more women. My experience of the few women that have been from that department who have come to the Women's Center looking for support is that it's intense.

I know that other women's centers, like UC Santa Barbara, have lots of money. They had a student initiative that funded them, and they have hundreds of thousands of dollars to do work. They have specific things for women who are parents. We don't have that kind of money, and I don't... I mean, with what I have I think we could run a successful Women's Center just doing what we're doing. I don't really need more of that kind of intense work. But it's important to keep making the invitation, to figure out what, how we could be supportive or helpful.

**Reti:** How are you working with the other resource centers on campus? Are there coalitional efforts?

**Valdez:** There were, before the diaspora, the casting out [the recent re-organization of management structure in Student Services—Editor] There was a pretty political and intense time when John Holloway was here. I have my own perspective about why that was so. But we clustered together as the resource centers. I was thinking about this this morning, because one of us is trying to set up a one-hour meeting with all the resource centers. We used to meet every month. Since we've been cast away, cast out, it hasn't happened. It seems more difficult to work with because it's . . . Nominally, we're not the same as we were. We're not student development or community services, and we don't have one boss.

**Reti:** Because you're now under OPERS, and so is the Lionel Cantú GLBTI Center. And then, the rest of the resource centers are...

**Valdez:** Under the Career Center. Barbara Bedford.

**Reti:** I didn't know about that part of it.

**Valdez:** Yes. And Larry Trujillo took Student Media. And Tara [Crowley], who was newly in a position of dealing with facilities, is now working under somebody in the

vice-chancellor's office. I think that we would have a really good opportunity to continue to work together, but the thought that I had earlier today is that we worked well when we had a common adversary, but when we just have ourselves and we're not fighting some common adversary, everybody, including me, has gone to their own job, and doing it. We have co-sponsored things nominally with the Asian American and Pacific Islander [AAPI] Resource Center this year. With the Chicano/Latino Resource Center, we will have one more event. And we have co-sponsored things with the GLBTI, but we're not in close collaboration. Kind of a shame, because there was a lot of potential to work well together. We like each other. And we did work well together, even when it was driven by issues, as opposed to working together. So it's still a possibility. And at least in my mind it's still something that's desirable.

### **Cardiff House as a Location for the Women's Center**

**Reti:** So what about Cardiff House as a location? How has that worked for you? How would you assess the positives and negatives of the location?

**Valdez:** (laughter) I had the most remarkable experience the other day. I was up on campus in a classroom setting. I was up there, and I thought, "Holy smokes, there are students going to classes up here!"

**Reti:** (laughs) Right.

**Valdez:** It was like, this is a university! There're kids going into these classrooms and they're sitting there and learning! I was over at Kresge, and I had been at the Women's Studies Library. And I'm walking along, and some of the doors are open, and there's a prof outside coaching somebody, and there are students passing. But it was the classroom doors open, and me going by and listening to these lectures that were going on . . .

And that's when it just hit me that where I am . . . I love where I am. I don't ever want us not to be there. But it is a little out of touch with . . . Except the students that come through to work there. We have classes that faculty are offering down there. We have TA sections down there. So it's used more now than it was the first two years that I was there. But as a center, it's not that visible, and therefore it's probably not as much support and service as it could be if it were someplace else. Although, where the ethnic resource centers are . . . There are certain students that will seek out places like the resource centers, and then there are students that, and I think they're the majority of them, go on doing their work and being hooked into their academic life, their social life, and then everything else. They don't, and won't ever, hook up with a resource center. So when I think about it like that, I'm fine with the location. We have more space than some academic units, or some other institutes. When I hear about where people are located, I'm happy to be the stewardess of that space, to have other people use it, and they do. Somebody wanted to do an event in November, and there were two days, two evenings, including weekends, when it was not booked.

**Reti:** Well it's a fantastic space. I got to use it for the *Out in the Redwoods* internship course. It was a great teaching space.

**Valdez:** The memorial that was at Colleges Nine and Ten, did you see it? It's a memorial for the men and women, the soldiers who have died in Iraq.

**Reti:** Oh, I didn't see it. I heard about it.

**Valdez:** It's at the Women's Center now. And on the front lawn there are over 800 stakes with pictures of men and women who have died in Iraq, and I can't imagine . . . People have come up to me, they've come into the center, and they've said, "Thank you! Thank you!" Everybody that uses it is so grateful for that space. The issue of visibility? We could just work harder and be up on campus, and the students that we have are great PR

people, the faculty. One faculty member used it last year for a class. He told other faculty members, and they're using it for their classes, and TA sections happen there. I think there are hundreds of people, because it is that space, that use it, that may not come to events, or come to special things, but they know the center exists, and they know what we do.

**Reti:** Right, so you're reaching a whole population that you wouldn't be reaching if you didn't have that space to draw them in.

**Valdez:** Exactly. It's hundreds of people. Student organizations have events there. The Indian graduate students had a . . . India just had its New Year's, so the Indian grad students used the space. We actually got a complaint from a music faculty member who's a new resident next door in the faculty housing. The grad students were outside, doing what you do on New Year's, yelling and screaming at two in the morning. I can handle it if somebody calls like that. We have really good relations with people who are staff at faculty housing, so if there's an event . . . Like there was a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party for a faculty member's wife whose kids grew up doing plays on the front porch of the Women's Center. She *had to have* her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party at that center because it was so dear to her. So it has a history, and I . . . To give that up? We'll just work harder at being more visible.

**Reti:** What about with the community people? Do they find you?

**Valdez:** They find us! If it's after five, they're really glad that there's no parking fee yet! Now with the light there at the street, at Coolidge, it's easier to find. Weddings, bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs, commitment ceremonies, all kinds of things happen there. I'm a bit of a traditionalist. I like it, and I like carrying on with its happening there. And where would they put us, in some closet? It's worth it to stay there.

## Relationships with Community Organizations

**Reti:** Okay. What about working relationships with women's organizations in the county, like the Women's Health Center? Do you have those kinds of connections?

**Valdez:** Yes. We just hosted the Lesbian Caucus of the Women's Crisis Centers of California. We just hosted their annual meeting at the center. So [that was through] Defensa de Mujeres. The NOW organization meets there. This year we had the Santa Cruz County Women's Commission meet there, because they're starting to meet in various locations, so their first off-County Administration Building Site meeting was at the Women's Center. Last year the California Women Lawyers Association met there. We don't have a really strong—and I haven't figured this one out—relationship with the Walnut Avenue Women's Center, though the director of the Women's Center was on the Women's Center board before I came, and she stayed on the board, although she never came to a meeting for the first two years. Then we talked and decided that she wouldn't even nominally be on the board. We help make connections for students at the Women's Health Center. They've undergone a couple of director transitions since I've been here. I don't know who the new person is. They actually have recruited me to be a board member but I'm really quite swamped.

**Reti:** That was an awful lot, on top of your job.

**Valdez:** Yes. And also I'm gone a lot of weekends because I'll go to Ukiah, or if Jim's here I want to be. I want to do things with him and my kids.

**Reti:** Sure.

**Valdez:** I think that there's always room for more. We also have a really good connection with the Survivors Healing Center. They have an annual Art of Healing show that's up at the center right now. They've had a transition in directors, but I want to maintain

those kind of relationships. I am on the board of the local American Association of University Women [AAUW] because I want to start a student chapter on campus. And some of the AAUW women have supported the Expanding Your Horizons in Science and Math conference, because that's a big initiative of the AAUW also. So I'm the university connection with the local AAUW board. In the past we've raised funds through *The Vagina Monologues* for a local women's center in Watsonville.

**Reti:** Does that exist yet, or is that in the planning stages?

**Valdez:** It was in the past. I don't know that it exists anymore. It was a detox center where the mothers could live with their families. There's also been a transition at the YWCA in Watsonville. I met the first director and we did a couple things with the local YWCA down there, but haven't had a connection with them for the last couple years, except to have their consultant come and talk to us about what the possibilities might be for the future. That's the kind of work that I like to do.

**Reti:** The alchemy you were talking about.

**Valdez:** The alchemy.

**Reti:** Yes, I love that.

**Valdez:** Yes. That's hard with faculty, but again, I understand. Mostly, I understand why. Those are the connections that I can think of with the community.

**Reti:** Okay.

### **The Women's Center Board**

**Valdez:** And of course the individuals who are on the board come from a variety of . . . They're business owners, or they're retired Cabrillo College people.

**Reti:** Are there particular board members who really stand out for you?

**Valdez:** Yes, Sheila DeLaney is a remarkable person in her stick-to-it-iveness and her energy. We have bi-weekly meetings in the fall to plan Expanding Your Horizons and she's at every single one of them, unless she's in France. And then we start meeting weekly, January, February. She's there. You know, just intensely committed to any work that she gets involved in. She pre-dated me at the Women's Center. She's very good. We have a woman, Barbara Mahone Brown, who was for a couple years a staff person at the Women's Center. She was a board member before, as staff. She's an artist and a poet and a scholar, retired from San Jose State. She's contributed a lot, with her wisdom and her art, to the Women's Center. One faculty member who's on sabbatical now, Eileen Zurbriggen, is . . . I'm so grateful when there're faculty that are willing to spend the time. And she's not even tenured. I really appreciate her being available. Beth Reese is a student who worked at the Women's Center for a couple years, and then was a staff person briefly in summer of 2003, and then in the fall of that year, while Barbara was on medical leave. She's a remarkable young woman, an alum. Very committed to the Women's Center.

### **The Women's Center Survey**

**Reti:** Roberta, let's start our second interview by talking about the survey that was conducted two or three years ago.

**Valdez:** I knew that there had been a survey done a few years before I got here. I think it was done by Shane Snowdon, and I'm not sure how it was distributed, how the information was collected. But I felt it was time that I learned what some of the needs of



students on campus were, staff, and faculty. At the same time that was happening, there was a Student Affairs research committee, and my colleague Larry Trujillo was on that, and a man who's just recently retired, who was in charge of research. And Larry invited me to come to the research committee, which was meeting sporadically, but it was a sanctioned committee of Student Affairs. And at the same time, I started talking to Ernest Hudson about wanting to do a survey, and he had new technology. Ernie had software that they've not tried out. It was [an] electronic survey that could go out to the emails of all the students on campus.

**Reti:** Oh, that's perfect.

**Valdez:** It was amazing. The timing was just right. They hadn't used it. It was brand-new. And actually, I started thinking about this when Ernie invited a man who does student affairs research, from another university, I think from Arizona. I loved what this man had to say about getting into a cycle of doing surveys every five years. Then there's in-between, gathering information about who you're serving and how you're doing. So all of this came together, and Ernie hired an undergraduate student in psychology, a young man who worked with Ernie and myself, and we designed the questions based on a survey that . . . I think the UC Santa Barbara women's center had done a survey. We tweaked it somewhat, but we had a number of questions. And then they knew more about how to formulate . . . So they individualized the questions for the Women's Center.

I basically wanted to know if people knew about the Women's Center, what they knew about the Women's Center, if they had experience coming to programs, and if they did or didn't, what would they like to see? What do they think that a women's center is all

about? I wanted to take the mission statement that had been developed so many years before, fifteen years, sixteen years before, and find out what women thought of that, as the beginning of a process to see what the thinking was now about women and feminism. The word “feminism” was in the original statement, and it had language that didn’t necessarily resonate with me. But I wasn’t going to change it if it resonated with students. So we chose a certain number of undergraduate women from the four different classes. First of all we sent out a letter to them saying that this was coming, watch for the survey. So that alerted them and they didn’t just delete it [from their email]. We also attached a drawing to it, so those who responded would be eligible for bookstore coupons, movie coupons, those kinds of things. And we got what Ernie and this other young man thought was a really good turnaround rate. And we can check in the report what the response rate was and what some of the response data was.<sup>3</sup>

It was thrilling to me, because we got a picture of what young women on campus were thinking about the Women’s Center. And the preponderance of young women did not know that there was a Women’s Center. That was good information. Those who did—we were off the charts with what we did. They loved it. It was a place where they found community. They loved the programs. But it wasn’t . . . We knew already . . . I think that’s been the struggle of the Women’s Center all along is because of our location, and because people [are] not understanding the relationship between Student Affairs,

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<sup>3</sup>The survey was conducted in 2002. It was distributed to 3,327 students via an email invitation to complete a survey on the web. 429 women responded, a thirteen percent response rate. When asked if they were feminists, thirty-eight percent indicated yes, fifty-two percent said they agree with feminist ideals but did not like the label, and ten percent said no. The percentage identifying themselves as feminists increased as students matured in class level.—*Women’s Center Executive Summary, June 2002 (Women’s Center archives)*.

Student Development, and what we do. It seems to always have been a struggle. It also seems that it's not just this campus, but other resource centers on other campuses. What are their roles? It's always being thought about and talked about.

Lots of respondents had issues with the word "feminism" and "feminist," because they didn't identify as feminists. And what we found was that that was particularly true for first and second-year students, but by the time we got to the respondents who were juniors and seniors, they were feminists. So there was this transition that happened at UCSC. The longer the students are here, the more likely they are to come to identify themselves as feminists. I thought that was really interesting.

We also got some good suggestions about how to include men at the Women's Center, or questions about, well, why weren't they? And some good suggestions about types of programs that were slightly different than what Shane [Snowdon] had found, but also very similar. Self-defense was really important [and] we have offered "Women and their Cars."

**Reti:** I noticed that was the big hit on the survey: "Women and their Cars."

**Valdez:** Exactly. Big. Things like that that are very simple to do, but very empowering and practical. It was cool information to have. So it got distributed to the board. We had big discussion about it, and that was the beginning of re-looking at the mission statement<sup>4</sup> and the word "feminism," and how it applied to the Women's Center, the work that we do, and looking at who our students, undergraduate constituents were. I

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<sup>4</sup>See Appendix for the revised vision statement.

should revisit that. Maybe we should do it again next year because it'll be my fifth . . . my fifth year? I've lost track of time.

**Reti:** You've been here long enough you're losing track.

**Valdez:** Whoa! Anyway, the survey process is a really important one because it's also an educational process. As people take it, if they didn't know that there was a Women's Center, they did as they took it.

**Reti:** It's an outreach tool in and of itself.

**Valdez:** Actually, a great one. So there's a good reason to do it on a pretty regular basis. Because through that process we have access to thousands of young women, undergraduates. I think I would look at it differently next time and see if we couldn't do outreach—a shorter survey, to more students. If we did twelve hundred this last time, I'd like to maybe double that. They were randomly picked.

The information was really eye-opening in terms of how young women don't see themselves as feminists coming to this campus. I think there was a pretty good cross-section of students of color also. They were self-identifying. I don't remember whether we asked about sexual preference. Somebody commented: besides male and female, you need to include trans, intersex, people with... Awareness helped us think about how we might do it differently in the future.

**Reti:** It's so complicated, because you get into much more complicated ideas about gender.

**Valdez:** Well, that's part of what we're supposed to be doing, looking at those issues. I think that was really a good awareness. You know, me coming here, that's probably a conversation or an awareness that I wouldn't have if I'd stayed living in Ukiah, California.

### **Re-visioning the Vision Statement**

**Reti:** So now, in terms of this project to revisit feminism in the mission statement. I noticed that you had a retreat that was largely focused around that question. What's been coming out of that? What have the questions been?

**Valdez:** I think that because we're a women's center, the questions have to do with how to be inclusive and not exclusive. And how to have the language of the mission statement not put people at an arm's distance, but have them find a place, or have it be a place that they can find something of themselves, or some place that they identify with. And that's where the word "feminism" or "feminist" became problematic, because [while] most of the board members consider themselves feminist, and staff consider ourselves feminist, very few students that I've actually worked with at the Women's Center, who've been staff, interns, volunteers, will use that word about themselves.

**Reti:** That's a pretty dramatic gap there.

**Valdez:** It's a big gap. If we have six interns, I would say two of them would come in considering themselves feminist, one very strongly. The other people know that they gravitate to the center, or to women friends, or to circles of women, or opportunities to learn about women, but haven't taken that title or that label themselves. I wanted—all of us wanted to have a conversation that didn't turn people off. Because in the past, when I

got here, there was a sense that the Women's Center was for white lesbian feminists. That was what people told me. We had several events for students of color that first year and people would say, "I feel comfortable here now, where I didn't before. I wouldn't have sought this place out." There was a mystique, or an aura of things that they didn't identify with, or ways of being a woman that they didn't identify with. So that was my challenge as the director. And the conversations were really interesting with the board because there were young women on the board who had come through this institution, and who were staunchly feminist. There were some of us who knew that we loved women's work, that we liked the company of women, we wanted equality and justice, and some people had come from social justice movements that hadn't taken on the... And then other women were drawn to it because they liked women's work, but they didn't necessarily . . . People who were not students, who were professional women, either on campus or out in the community who don't talk about themselves as feminists, though we are, in our own definition. So some of the questions were how to phrase the mission statement so it included everybody. I think that one of the phrases in the new mission statement that helps do that is we talk about "feminist traditions."

**Reti:** Oh yes, and I remember quite a bit of discussion [in the archive] about the word "traditions" and whether that was an oppressive word.

**Valdez:** Every word and every form of that mission statement . . . We did it in a year, and then this year we revisited it and hashed it out in a retreat. That's where we came up with this two-sentence, three-sentence statement, and then all of these elements are characteristics of the work that we do at the Women's Center. And "feminisms," or "feminism"? Big discussion. Traditions. How to incorporate activism and activists, and

that kind of discussion, because most of us felt like that was a piece of what feminism was about. But again, it could include people who didn't see themselves as feminists but were activists.

I personally am still not comfortable with the mission statement. It doesn't roll off my tongue. It's not one that I love. But it was one that we came to by consensus, and I think that most people felt like that. It could be revisited again, and maybe again, and again. But it's one that we all felt had all of the pieces anyway, that as a group and as individuals we were looking for, that defined the mission of the Women's Center as a place for all students to carry on, and to challenge and to reinvent, what feminism means.

**Reti:** When you say you're not comfortable with it yet, what do you mean by that?

**Valdez:** It doesn't come from my heart. As I said, it doesn't roll off my tongue. The part that I really do like is the part that talks about feminist traditions, because I don't think white women invented feminism. There are traditions in all parts of the world that are about women seeking equality and justice for themselves, and for all people, and for their children in all kinds of venues, from environmental to economic. Women have been doing that work. And there were just these movements that happened in Europe and in the United States that came to be associated with this word "feminisms." But I think that it goes really far back and deep.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Valdez:** I heard an Egyptian woman who's a feminist one time on a PBS special say, "White women, U.S. women, Western women did not invent feminism." I think I knew that, but hearing her say that, I really knew it. So that piece of it I like. And the other part of the discussion about how we ended up with that mission statement is that we always wanted to have a statement where you could be in conversation with somebody, where they'd ask, "Well, what does that mean?" We could talk about it. So I think it's okay for me to not have it be my own, because when I read it or say it I have to explain it to myself, and then I get to explain it to other people when they ask it. That's part of what we do in talking about what feminism is and what the Women's Center does. We engage people in conversations about, "What is it? Why do you need a Women's Center? What's important about focusing attention on only women?" I think that statement does that. It elicits, or solicits questions.

**Reti:** It's an ongoing conversation.

**Valdez:** Yes. So my sense of how the center is over the last few years is that it is really inclusive, and that some people are finding it, and that they also define what the mission of the Women's Center is. We do the mission statement because that's what institutions do, and I think that also provides a vision for those who work in it, that makes us go towards what that is. But there're all these women that walk in every single day. "Oh, can I do this here?" or "Can I do that here?" "Of course! And here's fifty dollars," or "Here's a wall that you can do that on," or "Take the outside [area] and do whatever you want." So just that place, and what we get to do there with people, women or men, who are focusing on women's issues, we get to practice it. I think that's the important part of what the space and the people that work there get to do. It just keeps being reinvented,



and so the other reason why I'm not that excited about having this . . . It's great to have a mission statement, but it seems like it's really organic and fluid and it's... I think it's really cool that places have mission statements, but I often wonder how often people reflect on them in their daily work. Okay, there's a mission statement. There's some goals and objectives. Here's your vision. I guess you have to have somewhat of that in who you are, and what you're doing. You can't stray too far from it, or else you find that you're not suited for that place, and you either have to leave, willingly or not. But that was the other part of having a mission statement. I really liked what the founding mothers did, and they were the founding *mothers*. They were driven by the newness of it. I wanted to change it a little bit for that inclusiveness, but I also thought that it would have been just fine to keep that as a statement, too. That also would have challenged people to ask, "Well what does that mean?"

It was a good process. It was [a] really interesting process that included staff and students, and we have had one faculty member that's been on the board for a couple of years, and community members. That process was really fun and interesting. But it took a year, two big conversations and then little ones in between, at board meetings. Committee work, people hammering things out and then bringing them back to the board for more conversation. It's a little bit like birthing something, because it was really painful. These people would go off and work really hard in committees and then come back to the big group and everybody'd go, "Eeuch!" It was the process, and I think that happens in a lot of arenas, but it's like—is this never going to end? But it was pretty fun, in the end. Everybody really felt good on the last day that we had that final statement,

and then the characters of the elements of the work that we do. They were pretty pleased with it.

**Reti:** Okay. Let's talk about the internships that you have going. You have six internship positions, is that right?

### **Student Interns**

**Valdez:** There were six last year, and with budget cuts, we cut it down to four this year. When I started, I think there were either four or six paid students, who were on work-study. They each had generic program coordination job descriptions. And then the next year, because we had started the Expanding Your Horizons in Science and Math conference, we had somebody that was designated as the women in science intern. We had a graphics person. They got more definition. We had [an] outreach person; we had an intern that was going to do gender education, which didn't quite pan out, but that, I imagined, would be a person that would develop information about communication, relationships, issues of safety and well-being, and go into the residence halls and do workshops. That didn't really happen. People wanted to do more programming. They didn't want to build up an entire program that would have peers that would work together and go do that. It's also really time-consuming. The energy of the students was more towards doing, focusing on things that they really wanted to know about, programs that they wanted to put on themselves. I guess there were a couple of years when we had designated interns, and last year, and this year, we have one intern who's working with the Inside-Out Writing Project, the jail project. And that's because I wanted to make a commitment to a grad student who started this program to continue the

program as she was phasing out, because I think the work is important and it draws a lot of young women who are working as prison abolitionists or on women in prison issues. There's this whole group of people that seem to be interested in studying that. I wanted this project, that the grad student had started, to continue, so I designated one position for that intern. And also, the Institute for Advanced Feminist Research. I wanted a link with Helene [Moglen] and Katherine Norwood, so we designated one of the internships this year to be that bridge, that link with that institute.

**Reti:** Oh, great.

**Valdez:** But it's still, both of those are program coordinators. So they have chosen to work in specific areas. They also do other programming kinds of things. But we don't have the specific focuses that we did in the past.

**Reti:** And how many hours a week do each of these interns work?

**Valdez:** They work between twelve and fifteen hours a week.

**Reti:** Okay. And then besides that you have a program coordinator as the other professional staff person.

**Valdez:** Yes.

## **Funding Challenges**

**Reti:** I noticed [from the retreat minutes] that you were trying to get an office manager. What happened with that?

**Valdez:** The California economy.

**Reti:** (groans, both laugh) I was afraid you were going to say that.

**Valdez:** Yes.

**Reti:** I can really see where it's so needed. You're taking on so much.

**Valdez:** I'm glad you can see that. I do so much that if I didn't have to do, I could free [time] up to establish more relationships with faculty, do more outreach with other units on campus to make those connections. The way we get money is through the Student Fee Advisory Council. We didn't do a presentation this year, for next year. Nobody really knows when the budget will turn around. But I have a five-year plan. The office manager is part of that plan, and every time I get an opportunity to speak about what we need, it'll include that.

**Reti:** I noticed that the funding for the Women's Center really has not changed dramatically since the early days.

**Valdez:** Nineteen-eighty-seven.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Valdez:** The salaries have changed, but the programming . . .

**Reti:** So you see one of your greatest needs as being able to do more outreach?

**Valdez:** This work, and probably everything about working in Student Affairs, is about building relationships with people, and having the time to go out and have a conversation with Elizabeth Stephens, because she really wants to hook up with the Women's Center, and figure out how to have more focus of women in art, and do

projects, and have interns. Use that space to create projects and . . . Or women in science. There are a growing number of women in engineering and science on this campus, and some of them are the most isolated, because those are still pretty male-dominated areas of study. And there could be a lot more connection with faculty.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Valdez:** We just had a little debacle about connection with a faculty member, though. That was kind of interesting. Want me to tell you about it?

**Reti:** Sure.

**Valdez:** I invited Amy Lee Campbell to the campus. [As I said last time] she's written a book on Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and had access to Ruth Bader Ginsburg's papers, which are in the bowels of the Library of Congress, her papers for when she worked with the ACLU and started the Women's Rights Project. I thought the information was really interesting. I always want to know more about Ruth Bader Ginsburg. So Amy wrote this book, and I invited her to come out and talk about her research, which actually was her Master's thesis. It was a really narrow piece of research, because she wanted to show how Ruth Bader Ginsburg's work and some of the twenty-three cases that she took to the Supreme Court made legislation and changed things for women, employment-wise, and access in some areas. What I like to do when I have a guest like that is link them up with a faculty member who's teaching a class similar to what the content is. Gina Dent was teaching a women and the law class last quarter, and I emailed her and asked her if she wanted to have a guest speaker and she said yes. I think she must have done a little research herself, but when Amy came to campus I brought her up to Gina's class and I

sat next to Gina in the front row. Amy, who's this young thirty-year-old woman, was asking this class, and there were probably maybe eighty students in there, many of them, most of them it seemed like, students of color. And Amy's a white woman, with . . . she doesn't have, like, really good pedagogical skills. She wasn't a great teacher. She had a lot of energy, but she was asking questions that there's no way these students really would have known unless they . . . They were about the women's movement. It was a little off. She didn't recognize who her audience was.

**Reti:** Ouch.

**Valdez:** I felt really badly for the guest, who didn't know that any of this was going on, but because she didn't know who her audience was, and hadn't done a lot of research, and I hadn't laid the groundwork to say, "This person, this faculty member has this history, and she probably has this perspective, coming from a woman of color perspective of teaching women and the law, because they're all talking about intersections and..." I don't think that Gina enjoyed this talk very much, and in fact she was really critical of it. And the next class, I found out later, because one of our student interns was in that class, there was this huge debate that was about how the speaker and the content only considered white women, and she didn't have this awareness, or this critique that included women of color, and the perspective that these laws might have enabled white women to have more access and be protected, but didn't speak to the issues for women of color in many communities. So it actually turned out that it was a pretty heated and harmful discussion, to at least the woman who's an intern at the Women's Center. She spoke up, and because of what she said, critiquing Amy's presentation, she became a target of some comments that were pretty racist, and so there

was this huge discussion. And it all was kind of spearheaded by this speaker that I brought. So I learned a lot from that, and one of the things that I will do from here on out is give the speaker a little context, and say, when you speak, you need to consider that there are women of color, and there's a perspective, probably a thread of what their research and study is in this class or in this campus or whatever, and that you need to speak about differences in sexual preference, and at least think about those things. Think about your work, and juxtapose them next to these other things so you don't come from this purely . . . this one perspective.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Valdez:** So I learned a lot about how to prepare people to come to this campus and to talk about their work. I haven't taken the time to go back to Gina to say, "I want to know about what that experience was for you, because I want to do outreach to more faculty and I don't want to make those same mistakes, so what do you think?" So there's a lot that I need to learn about interacting with faculty, and having an office manager, and having a really efficient program coordinator would be great.

### **Burnout and Self-Care**

**Reti:** Well, related to that, (laughs) in your many goals and desires, how do you deal with burnout? How do you keep from just burning out?

**Valdez:** (pause) Boy, if you had asked me that last week I probably would have been a puddle. I probably would have fallen off my chair, just cried like crazy, because I was experiencing it really a lot. I know that it's really important for me to take care of myself and model that for young women. It's essential that as staff people in this workplace that

I don't model burnout, and overextending, and taking on more than I need to, or can. And [it] also might be a natural cycle that we all have to go through, to figure out our own cycles. But how I deal with it is I'm a member of [an] RC community, re-evaluation co-counseling, so I have regular sessions with people to do what's called discharging.

**Reti:** That's great.

**Valdez:** I also try and swim, and walk. Being physical for me, taking the time to be physical is really important. This morning I walked a couple miles with a friend and then we went and had coffee, and I don't do that nearly enough. But that kind of slows me down. I think that it's easy to get onto a treadmill, in my job, in any job on this campus, maybe, because there's so much work to be done. There's so much work in front of you, and it never . . . It just doesn't stop.

I actually am thinking of how to slow it down for all of us next year. Because some of my colleagues at some of the other women's centers in the UC system, one in particular, when they had a budget cut, they stopped. They took a whole year to do reflection, and planning, and looking to see what really were the perceptions and the needs, and then analyzing it, and then renewing their commitment, and starting anew with a different image. They changed their logos, and their image, and they changed how they do their work. Instead of that, a lot of programs are doing initiatives, things that are going deep into the institution, and hopefully making institutional change for women on campus. I'm thinking about and considering how to do that, because we just go from one program to the next program, to the next program, and . . . We support a lot of student-initiated things that don't take place at the Women's Center. Our name isn't splashed all



over it. We may have staff that attend, but we're not up in the forefront saying, "This is our program." I like that a lot. We have to be known, and we have to have influence, but we don't have to always be the big visible place. Although I like that also. I think that what we have to offer deserves that sometimes, and needs it.

Just for my own sanity and my own physical well-being, I think it would be good to step back and look at how we do what we do, and look at how other people do what they do. And take some time, and reorient ourselves. Because anybody working there could really get overwhelmed easily. I could stay there . . . Jim lives up in Mendocino County, so I could be there at seven o'clock in the morning and stay 'til ten o'clock every night. And I have.

**Reti:** Right. Not having a partner who's going, "Where are you? Aren't you coming home for dinner?" (laughs)

**Valdez:** Yes. I like doing that, because it gets some work done, and it clears my desk, and it makes me feel productive and efficient, but it has a physical and mental toll, and it's not worth it.

The other thing that I dislike, and maybe it's happening everywhere else, but I don't like how technology runs things, and that's the way that the university is going. You know, emails. Instead of having one phone call at a time, you've got fifty emails that show up in a day that you have to respond to. You can't possibly do fifty phone calls in the way that you do fifty emails.

**Reti:** Right. It's a work speed-up, basically.

**Valdez:** It's a work speed-up. And that sensibility, I think it's oppressive. I'd rather deal on the phone than email, and so I always answer my phone calls, and I always spend the time doing that. But then I feel pressure to do the email, so I go back to doing the emails first, and then the... It's really crazy. For me, it's taken personal relationships in a direction that I don't really like. But because we're at the university, and that's the way the university does business, that's the way we have to do it. So figuring out how to do good work, do it consciously, not burn myself out, and still have the big role that the Women's Center has on this campus from other people's perspectives...maybe? Maybe it's just in my head, you know. Maybe nobody has these big expectations for the Women's Center. But I put a lot on myself to have it be conscious and effective and known. It's a balancing act.

I also have, my two kids are here, and even though they're grown, they'll call and leave a message on my phone, and it will be seven o'clock and I won't be there. They'll leave this message that says, (pleading voice) "Mom!" And it just it pierces me. I think that I was pretty much there for them when they were kids, but I still want them to be around me, and if I'm that busy that I can't be home to talk to them, or go out to dinner with them, or something, that's the hard part.

**Reti:** Yes, they're still your kids, even though they're grown up. And you still want to have a life outside of work.

**Valdez:** Yes.

**Reti:** What would you say is the most gratifying part of your job?

**Valdez:** I think that it's when the students that come there, and the students that work there, [tell me] how special that place is, and how much it means to them. It's an atmosphere; it's an environment; it's the possibilities; it's how they found the center, and make it a piece of their community, or a piece of their experience here at the university that's comfortable and nurturing, and makes them think, and has them be able to do things that they wouldn't be able to do necessarily in a classroom. Or even as a project for their . . . You know, if they're in biological sciences, and they get to do a Good Vibrations workshop. That's like, the best, because they like what they're studying, but they also like learning these other things, and having them be received by other people. It's gratifying to me when people find the center and make it their own. Or say, "I'm glad I found this place, even though I'm graduating." It's a place where lots of seniors that are doing art projects come through there and put up their installations or exhibits. They're leaving and it might be the first time that they've found a space, but they're really, really, really happy that they've found it.

**Reti:** For a senior art show?

**Valdez:** Yes.

**Reti:** Is the art gallery space primarily used for student art shows at this point?

**Valdez:** Yes. We've a faculty show coming in March and April. Oceania Textiles. It's Tongan. South Pacific. So that'll be interesting. But it's mostly students.

**Reti:** And what about the library at the Women's Center? What's the status of that now?

**Valdez:** It's a reading library. It's not a lending library. We had a stellar librarian a couple years ago, Maureen Mbugua, and she really developed it, and worked with Jacquelyn Marie [women's studies librarian at McHenry Library] to cull the books, and get it really in good shape, in terms of what was there. It's not used in the way the GLBTI library is used, because we don't have anybody overseeing it. But it's growing. Whenever we have a new faculty book celebration, we get copies of their things. There are certain things that I see that I like to have in the library, like books about women in history, feminism, and women's health, some fiction. So it's growing a little bit. But rather than put a lot of money into that, as I have, in the last couple years, we're kind of stepping back from that, asking people for donations. The board is interested in building it a little bit, and they will purchase a book, or donate a book, and we'll put a little plate in there that says "donated by." That's how it's probably going to grow in the future.

**Reti:** Do you still have the anonymous HIV testing?

**Valdez:** We're a site for the Health Center's . . . Well, it's actually the Student Initiative that has free, confidential, and I guess it's anonymous, HIV testing in various locations around campus. The GLBTI, and the Women's Center has for the last three or four years been a site. The students that run the program ask us, and they set up in the back room. In the winter and the spring is when they actually do it and then advertise that people can come there. But that's not something that we actually do.

**Reti:** I see. Okay. Graduate students. How successful has the Women's Center been in starting to reach more graduate students?

**Valdez:** We're not doing anything right now, unfortunately. Three years ago, I worked with a graduate student when she and I were both preceptors at Cowell, and we established this really . . . It was a fine idea, and a pretty successful event where we invited women grad students to talk for fifteen minutes about their research, and then on a peer level be critiqued or have people ask questions. We had six women that were doing some fascinating, interesting, wonderful research. Two of them on China, one of them on Shakespeare and feminism. It was fascinating. We wanted to duplicate that. And the next year, I worked with a grad student who . . . Nothing came of it, really. Because it will take somebody besides me taking it on.

**Reti:** Sure.

**Valdez:** The panel was three years ago, and two years ago I was linked with the graduate studies department. Do you remember Sandra Pacheco? She was an outreach person for graduate studies. She was hired by Frank Talamantes. She and I established a rapport, and started working. We had a reception for grad students. We did a survey of what they thought they needed, and we started monthly meetings that we called WEAVE. It was Women Educating...something. We had monthly meetings for two quarters. We had Rita [Walker] come in and talk about sexual harassment. We had a crafts night where we made cards, around December, the end of the quarter. We did book readings. During each of the meetings the Women's Center paid for childcare, so it was really accessible. And then, I can't remember what happened, but after that, Sandra left because she knew that Frank was leaving, and he had hired her. But that kind of connection with somebody who could fund, and get food, and do the publicity, because they had access

to graduate students through email . . . It was really efficient, and it would be something to really work on developing again. And it's not happening.

**Reti:** But there are some good ideas out there for someone to pick up on in the future.

**Valdez:** Absolutely. I think it's a really important piece too, because grad students . . . We had a workshop. There were several women that were trying to decide: profession or family; family or profession? Those really hard choices about whether to have children, or how to have children and do your work that you've prepared so long and hard for, and you've spent so much money on. You really want to do it, but you also want family. So that was a big issue. And there were several books that had been written about that that we had beginning conversations about, and we wanted to invite some of the authors to talk about their research and their writing about that. So there's a lot to do.

## **Development and Fundraising**

**Reti:** Good. Okay. Development and fundraising. This must be becoming more important in our current budgetary environment. Have you been getting support from the development office?

**Valdez:** We have. We worked with the Student Affairs development officer a couple years ago, and developed a letter that went out to get money in the gift account. Then last year he funded another mailing that went out to graduate students, graduate alum, asking them to help contribute to an endowment. The Student Affairs development officer got us seed money of two thousand dollars from the Alumni Association, and our hope was that we would reach ten thousand dollars by 2005, in the fall of 2005. An initial letter went out last year. We met the match. We got two thousand from the Alumni

Association, two thousand plus a little bit more from this mailing. I think we're about at five thousand dollars. So we're going to do another letter, hopefully. I would like to say next fall, when we have our twentieth anniversary, that we have this endowment, we've reached the ten thousand dollar level to establish it.

**Reti:** Oh, that would be great.

**Valdez:** This is one of the things that some members of the board have really wanted to take on. When Arlyn [Osborne] was on the board briefly, before she retired, she did this whole plan about how to do development, and she was going to take it on, and then she left. Kathleen Hughes was on the board for a very short period of time either before or after that. She wanted to take on development. We ran into some brick walls with some of the people that were the founding mothers, because they don't believe that we should do fundraising. They think the university should support the Women's Center, and the more fundraising that we do, the more money, the more they might see that we don't need money, because we have this potential. So some of the women who were there at the beginning of the Women's Center and have the potential of giving to the Women's Center, have not. And we haven't figured out quite how to do that, but we'd like to. Even if it's just a nominal amount, so we can say, "This person gave." We have some support from some faculty on an annual giving basis, which is really wonderful, but it's a big . . . it's an area that I know nothing about. And the development person of Student Affairs, there's only one person, and they have all the resource centers. They've got OPERS; they've got the Health Center. I don't know how one person can do it, and there is an expectation that that person has quotas to meet. So they can't pay attention to the Women's Center like, of course, every person, every center, every unit needs. So it's left

to us. And the expectation is heavy on my shoulders, because I would like to learn more about it. I'd like to do it. I'd like to not just capture the funds that alumni might have, but also re-acquaint them, or acquaint them with the Women's Center and get them connected, because they have skills and talents that might be helpful to the Women's Center. One of the things that happened recently that was really a pleasant surprise is I got a check in the mail from a woman who is a realtor, and some real estate people at the sale of a property...

**Reti:** Oh yes, they give a percentage of their fee to charity.

**Valdez:** They give a percentage, exactly. So we got this check, and I called this woman and I said, "Thank you very much! This is a great idea." And she was on her way out the door to go to the Caribbean or someplace, and . . .

**Reti:** (laughs)

**Valdez:** She said, "I'll call you. We should talk more about this." I haven't heard from her, and I haven't had the time to do it. But there are things like that that could be really beneficial to the Women's Center, but it takes time and focused energy to develop a little campaign like that. So what I do is every year I go over to the trailers where the telephone outreach people are. Do you know the telephone outreach?

**Reti:** I've heard of it, yes.

**Valdez:** It's this trailer that has this bank of phones and there're probably twenty students in there. And because my kids are both alumni, and even when they were students, we, at home, get phone calls from these young people, saying, "We're just



calling to see how your student is doing at the university, and if you have any questions." They were so compelling! They were wonderful! I always gave money. And in the past, I gave it to places like EOP because Emiliano was an EOP student. But now that I'm at the Women's Center, I get those same phone calls, and I give to the Women's Center. But I also go over because the outreach people ask different units, including the resource centers to come and give a spiel. Because while these students are talking, if they know about the Women's Center, and their student is a woman, they can say, "Well, here are some areas where if you feel compelled to give, you could give." And they would name the Women's Center. So I do minimal, in terms of development. I wish I could do more. But I actually don't want to. I think that it's a job for a completely separate person.

**Reti:** Yes.

**Valdez:** For all of the resource centers. I think that if the ethnic resource centers, GLBTI, and the Women's Center had one person that focused on us and what we do, because what we do is similar, it would be really fabulous.

**Reti:** What a great idea.

**Valdez:** And we're not like UC Berkeley. There's tons of money that comes into some universities, because they do have development people. Also, this university, the development people are told to focus on certain initiatives that the chancellor has, or certain things that are pet projects. And even though the development person tries to be neutral, which is really good, it's hard because there is that pressure. So the answer is, we're not doing very much right now.

**Reti:** Do you have a Friends group?

**Valdez:** I won't start a Friends group, because you have to do annual reports and submit them to the chancellor. It's a separate little stand-alone group that takes energy to run and interact with. We investigated it. I read up about it, I talked to a lot of people about it. I've talked to groups that have Friends. There are pluses and minuses about it. I know that when Deb [Abbott], two years ago, had that big event down at the UCSC Inn, that was put on by their Friends [of the Lionel Cantú GLBTI Center], I couldn't walk out of there without giving money, because it was so . . . like, you *wanted* to give. That group was so lively; it was so wonderful. I know that they're doing good work, and I want to support them, but to create that space, with that enthusiasm, it takes all those people that did it, and I wish that...

**Reti:** Right. It's a lot of work.

**Valdez:** Yeah.

**Reti:** Is there anything you'd like to add?

**Valdez:** I think that one of the issues of the Women's Center is one that all of us as resource centers on campus struggle with, and it's how to be located in the institution, in the hierarchy, to be all that we can be. And in the fall, we were . . . I talked about the diaspora, how we were separated out, put out like that.

**Reti:** Right. All the different resource centers.

**Valdez:** I think that one of the challenges of the Women's Center location, large charge, with the large number of students in general, but women in particular . . . I think it's

particularly challenging that the university, the administration, doesn't look at ways to highlight and show off some of these smaller units like the Women's Center. If an administrator, a chancellor, if not the chancellor, somebody like the vice chancellor, went out and talked about these particular places, the Women's Center in particular, it would be really helpful for the work that we do. I know that that happens on some campuses. I know that the Women's Center is looked at as contributing to the leadership, and the leadership development on campus. I'm not sure why that doesn't happen here. Maybe it's my personality, versus other people's personalities, that doesn't know how to navigate the system to get the light to shine on the Women's Center, but I think there's so much opportunity to work with EEO Affirmative Action, to work with Title IX, to work with the [Cowell] Health Center, and Rape Prevention Education. [But] there's not somebody saying, "I want you all to work together and talk together." There's not that kind of leadership, and I think that that makes it really difficult on this campus. And it's not the spread-out nature of the geography. It's really, I think, our administrative leadership and vision for working together. I think that's true also for how the resource centers are not connected with faculty too, because there could be strong leadership to have that happen. So that makes my job a lot harder, besides not having a lot of money, and therefore not a lot of free time to go out and develop those things. There's not the help from above to say, "It's important that you do these things, and I'm going to pave the way for you a little bit." I think that is one of the challenges on this campus. I see that it is on other campuses too, but when a higher administration supports the women's centers, like at UC Santa Barbara, UC San Francisco, which is very different from us because it's an all-graduate student campus, there's this direct line to administration that says, "You will do this, and you will work with these people." I don't know that that will

ever change here, but I see that it certainly makes visibility, doing a more effective job, reaching more students, having the light shine on the work and the progress, and the resolution of issues facing women on this campus, or in the larger picture, a lot easier when that kind of link with administration, that kind of commitment by leadership is in place.

**Reti:** Well, hopefully, this anniversary coming up will do something to improve the visibility and shine a light on everything that's happened in the last twenty years.

**Valdez:** I think that it could. It has that potential.

**Reti:** Okay. Well, thanks, Roberta.

**Valdez:** You're welcome. Thank you.



Roberta Valdez and student

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<sup>1</sup>This name index covers all of the individuals mentioned in these oral histories who directly or indirectly influenced the Women's Center. Those researchers interested in full text searching are encouraged to search the electronic (PDF) version of this volume available on the Regional History website at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/index.html>—Editor.

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Women's Center, 1980s

## **Historical Chronology of the UCSC Women's Center**

1855

Albion Jordan builds a ranch house on property he originally acquired in 1849.

1865

Henry Cowell purchases the Cowell Ranch, which includes Jordan's ranch house and builds the Cowell Ranch House. He begins running a limestone quarrying and cattle-ranching operation as part of the Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Company headquartered in San Francisco.

1965

UC Santa Cruz opens its doors at the former Cowell Ranch in Santa Cruz, California.

1974

Women's Studies Bachelor of Arts approved; women's studies collective established.

1978

Helene Moglen is hired at UC Santa Cruz as dean of humanities, the provost of Kresge College, and a professor of literature. She begins the process of reorganizing women's studies from a student-run program to an institutionalized program with regular faculty members.

September 1984

A group of faculty gathers at Asilomar conference center in Pacific Grove to plan women's studies curriculum, organize the Feminist Studies FRA, and a new Women's Center.

October 1984

Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer grants the Cardiff House to the Women's Center, as well as financial support for the first three years.

June 1985

Diane Reeves is hired as the first director of the Women's Center and Kathie Olsen is hired in the assistant position later that summer. Reeves stays until June 15, 1986. Kathie Olsen runs the center single-handedly in the summer of 1986.

September 1985

The Women's Center opens its doors in Cardiff House.

September 1986

Beatriz Lopes-Florez is hired as new director of the Women's Center. Kathie Olsen remains as assistant.

January 1987

Arlyn Osborne is hired as the new assistant. Kathie Olsen leaves for Ashland, Oregon.

1991

Beatriz Lopez-Flores goes on sabbatical and Arlyn Osborne is interim director for several months.

1994

Beatriz Lopez-Flores leaves the directorship and Arlyn Osborne takes over as interim director.

1995 (September 1)

Shane Snowdon arrives as the new director of the Women's Center.

1996 (August)

Arlyn Osborne leaves the Women's Center to become Residential Life Coordinator at Kresge College. Erin Ramsden is soon hired in the assistant position.

1999 (October 31)

Shane Snowdon leaves directorship; Erin Ramsden leaves at the same time. Deborah Abbott, director of the GLBT Center, helps to run the Women's Center. Helen Mayer is in the assistant position.

2000 (August 1)

Roberta Valdez arrives as director of the Women's Center. Helen Mayer is in the assistant position.

Fall 2005

Twentieth anniversary of the UCSC Women's Center.



# Revised Vision Statement

*The UCSC Women's Center affirms the dignity and diversity of all women. The center continues and challenges feminist traditions by creating community space for all women and allies to achieve individual and social change.*



**Irene Reti**, who edited this volume, was born in Los Angeles and moved to Santa Cruz in 1978. She received her B.A. in Environmental Studies (with a concentration in women's studies) from UCSC in 1982, and her M.A. in History from UCSC in 2004. She is also a writer and the publisher of HerBooks feminist press. Reti has worked for the Regional History Project since 1989 and has been the project's director since 2004.

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